

UNCERTAIN MASCULINITIES

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INTRODUCTION

This study is an autoethnographic undertaking. It has been an intense and thorough examination of my own artistic process yet also a profound departure and reinterpretation. The enquiry has inaugurated a whole series of working procedures and seen the emergence of significant new ways of creating artworks. It has been a most insightful and transformative experience, yet at the same time most difficult and unnerving. It has not always been a straightforward journey, especially as I have, in the course of the research, delved deep into my own psychological motivations and incumbent neurosis.

At the outset of this study I held a rather amorphous idea that I could express a succession of personal themes through using and adapting found objects and items of furniture but it soon honed down to a preoccupation with one solitary multifaceted entity: the chair. I became fascinated with its variability, its ubiquity and its potential for metaphor and metamorphosis. The chair subsequently became an essential fulcrum for most of my work.

Notions of masculinity, both personal and societal, have also been rooted in this research. Masculinity has long held a fascination for me. I have invariably felt both an insider and an outsider to it. As a heterosexual male, a father, a wage-earner, I am aware that I conform to many of its prerequisites and values yet at the same time I have always tried to vie against it, viewing it as posturing, unfair and even absurd. This conflict also lies at the heart of much of my artistic exploration.

This period of study has been contextualised by engagement with a succession of artists and theorists who have provided new frames of reference and stimuli for my studies. I have investigated theory pertaining to objects, their manufacture and their ownership and

examined artists that have used them as central conduits for their ideas. I have immersed myself in writings about the chair, its history, design and cultural significance. I have considered how aspects of art and psychology interrelate. I have read widely, made personal discoveries, made wrong turns and long deviations.

During the doctorate, I have examined my themes using a wide range of different working methodologies. I have had to learn how to programme a plasma-cutter to cut sheets of steel, I have used blow-torches to scorch wood, pincers to cut lead, and worked within an array of other unfamiliar procedures. I have experimented with constructing my ideas in virtual reality and also coped with the realities of collaborative making. Through this period I have evolved a methodical and critical working process; it commences with a series of small drawings that are evaluated, then rendered and refined at a larger scale; this is then followed by a series of explorative maquettes or paintings which in turn, culminate in what I see as a definitive 'artwork' stage. I have also learnt that what seems definitive is not always so. I have learnt that some of the sketches, models and preparations hold potency in their own right.

Alongside all this, I have set about showing my work in public exhibitions valuing the input of wider critique and approbation. I have ventured out as part of collaborative shows and these have, amongst other things, illuminated the importance of judicious editing and curatorship. My solo exhibition *Chaired By..*, towards the latter part of the study, provided an important exploration of the viability of displaying the diverse strands of my practice together in a single environment. This show has afforded me the confidence to formulate my plans for my final doctorate submission.

PERSONAL AND CREATIVE CONTEXT

The doctoral programme at UEL has supported my transition from professional illustrator to practising artist. This process has permitted me to feel more confident in blurring the boundaries of what I have always felt as a series of coexisting disciplines within my work. Recent debate, especially within *British Art Show 8* and the Turner Prize, has given me confidence in validating this redefinition.

My rationale for this doctoral study and some of its research preoccupations are deep seated. Making art has always been my mainstay. Throughout school my workbooks were ornately embellished with drawing. My free time was dedicated to drawing, painting, design and making. In 1984 whilst still at school, I became *Young Engineer for the Midlands* and subsequently, during my first year of undergraduate study, became runner-up in the national *Young Engineer for Britain* finals. I had designed a walking aid, for the disabled or infirm, which integrated a seat.

I studied illustration at undergraduate level and gradually became interested in the expression of social and political satire. Alongside completing briefs inspired by texts I was interested in (particularly Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*) I started to undertake illustration commissions for professional clients including a regular piece called *Awful Corner*, for Blueprint magazine, satirising contemporary Design and Architecture. My BA Dissertation centred on personal history. *To the Miner Born*, investigated how family-histories, social mobility and received wisdoms and stories shape the individual. The thesis pivoted on research into my maternal family.

My Masters study was preoccupied with notions of masculinity, studying how men are perceived, represented and stereotyped across the media. I researched and ‘quite literally’ drew extensively on this subject. I was interested in how much work and analysis had been done in relation to women’s issues and roles, compared to how little had been made about men. I examined male archetypes, proclivities, and obsessions, and through my creative work attempted to confront some entrenched stereotypes.

On graduating from my MA, I gained British Council sponsorship to participate in the *Thapong* International artistic residency in Botswana (1989). This pivotal moment in my career, gave me the opportunity to work alongside a range of artists from around southern Africa as well as the American sculptor Willard Beopple. From this experience Zimbabwean sculptor Adam Madebe and Boepple held particular significance for me. Madebe’s imposing figurative work, fashioned from salvaged and rusting metal, envisioned aspects of both statuesque yet ultimately frail male posturing. Beopple’s succession of towers or ladders (fig.1) conduct their beholder into realms of abstract form and negative space. For me, his skeletal structures insinuate notions of aspiration and also vulnerability. At a time where I was preoccupied with two-dimensional imagery these sculptural revelations held a lasting resonance and I subsequently, whilst pursuing a career in editorial illustration, persisted with experiments in sculptural making.



Fig.1 Beopple.W (2014) Inside Out. Aluminium 84x 43 x23.4 inches.

<http://www.nyartbeat.com/media/event/2014/9FE9-620> (Last accessed 24th. August 2016).

On returning from this residency, my creative practice moved in several concurrent directions, as Illustrator, Artist, Draughtsman, Printmaker and Educator.

I became a successful illustrator working for a range of periodicals and magazines. I did regular commentary pieces for *The Independent*, *The Spectator* (fig.2), *The New Statesman*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Observer*. I worked for *Punch*, *GQ*, *The Guardian*, *the Times* and the *Evening Standard*. I created for a monthly comment strip for *Creative Review* (back page- *Brief Lives*) and contributed satiric pieces for a panoply of other publications at home and overseas. I worked on book cover images for Jonathan Cape, Vintage, Penguin and Picador, advertising campaigns for Smile Bank, Holstein Pils, Amnesty International and design work for a range of clients such as the *Post Office* and *Waterstones*. As an illustrator, I learnt to succinctly encapsulate an idea for the reader. Written ideas were synthesised, or made less dense and impenetrable. Through humour and satire, I found that I could engage in political or social commentary that had immediacy as well as the benefit of a diverse and extensive audience.



Fig.2 Abrams, J (2009) One of a series of Political Front Cover Illustrations for *The Spectator Magazine*.

Alongside illustrating, I had always made more personal, self-initiated artistic work. I created paintings triggered by political or social events. Large (2 metres sq.) paintings of cowboys and Indians were conceived to comment on the wars in the Middle East. Paintings of vast coiling snakes, offset with diminutive and insignificant ladders, referred to social immobility.

In the years prior to my doctoral study, I started to make more sculptural work (figs. 3 and 4), creating 'amalgam' pieces from objects that had been sourced or scavenged. These pieces aimed to celebrate an aesthetic within discarded objects as well as to allude to their previous purpose and history, whilst also aiming to remind their beholder of unrestrained waste and our throwaway culture. Other pieces had a conceptual basis to these combinations. For example, a shed (fig.3) is encrusted with a shimmering layer of recycled keys alluding to ideas of ownership, intrusion, belonging and security. The shed has no lock, just a key handle to pull its door open.



Fig. 3 Abrams, J (2011-13) *Key Shed*. Wooden Shed, salvaged keys, clock and glass.



Fig. 4 Abrams. J (2011) '*Amalgam*' sculptures.

In 2007 for a period of two years I held the position of Artist in Residence at the London Sinfonietta, studying the orchestra in rehearsal and in concert and creating a succession of drawings and artworks based on the experience (fig.5). This culminated in an exhibition at the Queen Elizabeth Hall at the Southbank Centre, London. The residency afforded me time and space to reconsider and reinvigorate my interests in observational drawing and realise its importance to my artistic research, process and expression. Subsequent to this experience, I have rigorously maintained this study through keeping a succession of sketchbooks dedicated to observational drawing.



Fig. 5 Abrams, J (2009) *Adams Rehearsal*. Drawing from London Sinfonietta Residency.

Using printmaking to examine and expand my ideas has also been a consistent preoccupation. I displayed a series of A0 hanging screenprints as the centrepiece to the exhibition at the Southbank Centre. These abstract prints were derived from gestural ink drawings that responded to different aspects of the ensemble's avant-garde classical repertoire.

In addition to making a succession of etchings exploring notions of the human condition, I made a series of screen-prints that recurrently utilised typography and signage motifs. In 2006 I had a solo exhibition, *Z-A*, at the Galleri Breneriet in Oslo comprising of a set of autobiographical screen-prints which were an investigation into notions of masculinity and a sardonic interpretation of the self in decline (fig.6).



Fig.6 Abrams, J (2006) Z-A combined image. Screenprint 594 x 841 mm.

My practice as an artist has consistently run alongside my practice as a teacher. I have taught in a range of institutions and am currently Associate Professor in Illustration Animation at Kingston University.

My professional activities as an artist inform my teaching, my teaching informs my practice. The communication of ideas is a constant pedagogic theme and my development of a digital 'Ideas on Ideas', resource has not only been instructive for my students but for my own development. This resource pulls together the writings of Artists, Designers and Theorists on how ideas are initiated and expanded. Teaching at home and abroad has helped me to coalesce some of my thinking, open me to new ideas and research methodologies.

THEORY AND CREATIVE PRACTICE

This period of doctoral study has afforded me the opportunity to research the context and motivations of my artistic compulsion and formulate significant new methodologies and working trajectories. It has been a primarily auto-ethnographic process contextualised with reference to other artists and relevant theoreticians.

For this document, I have recorded a succession of artistic enterprises that have been pivotal to my research. I have placed them, as best as I can, in a chronological sequence in order to exemplify the trajectory of this study. I discuss the developmental process behind the establishment of an artwork and then I note some of the key artists, theorists and influential exhibitions which I have referenced to extend my understandings of the subject matter.

THE HUMAN CHAIR- OBJECTS AND ANTHROPOMORPHISM

2012-2013

My research commenced with an interest in creating sculptural formations that could have the capability to present a range of social and political ideas regarding gender-roles, sexuality, social hierarchy, subservience and disability , through using everyday objects and furniture. I wanted to determinably move beyond the confines of my professional role as an

illustrator, to develop a personal and expansive artistic vision that could communicate in a more thought provoking and evocative manner.

By amalgamating found objects I wanted to construct installations that could produce conceptual collisions and I envisaged creating speculative and experimental artworks that would invite the viewer to deeper contemplation of the issues with which I was involved. For this process to happen, I set about radically changing my process and working methodologies, meticulously creating chronological experimental sketches, paintings and maquettes. These I refined, evaluated, and realised as three-dimensional sculptures. My research re-defined my practise as an artist and became significantly more self-reflective. I had been interested in the writings of Donald Schön (1983) and his practical views on *reflection-in-action* and I wanted to put his ideas to the test. My aim was to engender a practice that was expansive and interrogatory, investigating a range of methodologies and techniques with the purpose of creating original and provocative art works.

I became interested in the implications of the objects and materials I was experimenting with. I referenced Sherry Turkle who in her book *Evocative Objects, Things We Think With*, brings together essays by a range of artists, scientists and designers who contemplate the power and resonance of objects as diverse as a yellow raincoat, a slime mould, a wooden toy radio, a glucometer and a mummified body. In her analysis she reflects on the theory behind these evocations.

In one intriguing example, a radio, fashioned for or by an impoverished child in Durban, South Africa from wood, paper and broken glass is an object of *emulation and imagination* (Turkle, 2007 p.106) and it is not only a powerful signifier of those that have and those that have not, but also of a subversive view on the status of objects. The child can be seen as carrying his silent radio aloft as a loud proclamation of aspiration but also as a reminder of his poverty.

The wooden radio subverts itself as a commodity and reveals the social relations that commodities are designed to hide. (2007 p.312)

Turkle's views on Donald Winnicott had relevance too when she reflects on an essay about the resonance of a child's toy stuffed bunny. This is viewed as a 'transitional' object that has

a power to stand in for a sense of abandoned ownership and belonging , in this case the child's mother. The inanimate object is imbued with another sort of poignancy: the power of *inner and outer realities* (p.315) and is reminiscent of artist Grayson Perry's tricycles and *Alan Measles* teddy.

In Winnicott's view the transitional object becomes important in an infant's development and can *lead us to conceive of the infant's play as an early version of later cultural activity* (Walsh, 2013 p.116). The first objects a child recognizes as not part of their own body: the breast, the teddy, the comforter; all have power in forming our associations later in life.

Turkle also cites the French ethnologist and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss whose ideas on *bricolage* (Turkle, p.4) are relevant to my scavenging and piecing together of found objects to construct new ideas and meanings. Bricolage is:

a way of combining and recombining a closed set of materials to come up with new ideas. Material things, for Lévi-Strauss, were goods-to think-with and, following the pun in French, they were good-to think-with as well. (p.4)

Turkle also discusses a range of psychoanalytic concepts in relation to objects, particularly the Freudian idea of 'the uncanny' in which familiar 'homely' things are rendered unfamiliar through repression. Normal objects, she notes, can be altered in subtle yet unnerving ways. In one example, some rocks, the belongings of a dead spouse, become powerfully evocative and an almost tangible presence in the life of his widow (p.8). The rocks disorientate. They are not just reminders of, but seem to become, the dead husband. Objects can, Turkle reminds us, house psychological potency.

Whilst developing ideas for my artwork I also became interested in sociologist and theorist Richard Sennett's ideas on materials and on making. In *The Craftsman* (2008), his explorations into *material consequences* and the *honest* material (p. 137) highlight how even the most humble of materials can be imbued with poignancy and purpose, making them *culturally consequent* (p. 144). In utilising the example of the common brick he notes that it has significance far beyond that of a mere architectural building block. Solid and ubiquitous, it also transforms to become understood as *humble, solid, reliable* and *purposeful*.

(Our anthropomorphic projection) *into materials does not aim at explanation; its purpose is to heighten our consciousness of the materials themselves and in this way to think about their value.* (p. 137)

Investing inanimate objects with human qualities also functions to provide a type of personal ‘metamorphosis’:

Marking an object can be a political act, not in the programmatic sense, but in the more fundamental matter of establishing one’s presence, objectively. Anthropomorphosis reveals the power of metaphor and a technique for manufacturing symbols. (p. 144)

Materials, carefully crafted, are *good to think with* (p.129) but he also discusses how the craftsman or artist can deliberately plan resistance and ambiguity creating *momentary disorientation* to entertain and inform (p. 232). This disorientation is an essential strategy I aim to employ.

Improvisation is also a relevant theme that Sennett investigates. Craftsmen modulate their output by *taking detours* (p. 238) and straying beyond the prescription of the everyday; like a jazz musician they anticipate, develop and improve:

Intuitive leaps happen, in reflections people make on the actions of their own hands or in the use of tools (p. 290)

These creative transitions are far from haphazard. They are seated in a deep understanding of the nature of the materials: their design, structure and implications.

Concurrent with these theoretical investigations, I set about researching a range of fine art practitioners that, I felt, could help contextualize my ideas. Richard Wentworth’s work enacts new narratives and meanings by pairing the most humble of objects, whilst Grayson Perry communicates through a variety of media very personal visions and viewpoints with humour and clarity; Mona Hatoum alters everyday domestic furniture and objects to create poignant emotional responses. I also looked at how Yinka Shonibare explores issues of race, identity, history and class in his sculptures.

I was interested in how Richard Wentworth appropriates the form of objects in his constructions, delivering new narratives and meanings. In *Fable* (fig.7) he utilises a salvaged ladder that struggles its way pointedly across a room. Its lowly salvaged 'left out in the rain' patina is juxtaposed with a shiny metal bowl that provides its support and jarring counterbalance. The ladder is a signifier of aspiration and ambition yet it forlornly leads nowhere. Images such as this are imbued with a narrative yet allow their audience ample room for contemplation. As Marina Warner points out:

The juxtapositions and combinations propose an alternative formal system, turning the invisible into the visible, the humdrum into the significant, ground into figure, the dumb into the telling. His buckets and ladles and ladders and water tanks and doors and strainers and ballcocks and dibbers...are dumb things encrypted in sentences, made to talk. (Warner, 1993, p.11).



Fig. 7: Wentworth, R(1988) *Fable* (Warner, p.29)

Wentworth's process is not to seek things out but to happen upon them.

I like to be near things at the end of their social life...that plate lying in the gutter is symbolic, somehow; you know you can save that plate, you can take it home and put it on the wall and never eat off it, and so it's the most important plate in the world, you can put back into it all that meaning, or you can stand on it and it's on its way to a landfill (Warner, p.13).

Wentworth's process is unfettered by the constraints of a particular medium. He insists that his medium is 'thoughtfulness' (Raney, 2003, p223) and that he does not employ 'tidy strategies for making work' (p216 In *The Stile* (Fig.8), he sets up a dialogue between objects that would not habitually coincide; brooms puncture through an office desk, rendering both useless. Social meanings are evoked: the nature of work, hierarchy of roles and the low-paid who come in when the deskwork is done. Wentworth fashions a new story from objects that would otherwise be mute or retain a single prosaic meaning.



Fig. 8: *Stile* 1991, Richard Wentworth (Warner, p.29)

I also found Grayson Perry pertinent to my research. His work exhibits a rich vein of social commentary on gender and politics, rendered in a richly adorned sardonic style. Whether creating ceramics, embroidery, fabrics or prints, the materials are deliberately chosen and are central to the meaning. He revels in subverting found artefacts and artworks, relishing their skilful craftsmanship, and then transcribing his own personal histories and viewpoints onto versions of them.

When asked about the meaning of his work, Perry replied *It's no good asking me. I put forward the question in the work, I don't answer it.* (Jardine, 2004, p.5) The questions he poses are pointed ones: the nature of craft, the vexed relationship between high art and low art, gender, decoration and illustration.

Perry revels in candid expression and brings it to the centre of his own artistic pieces, which are also highly personal and intimate. On first examination, they can appear salacious, can be jokey and juvenile. A rural scene on one of his ceramic pots *Taste and Democracy* (fig.9) is punctuated by comic book asides. A musclemen exclaims in speech bubble format '*It's about time a transvestite won the Turner Prize*'. The bikini-clad woman he carries glibly proclaims '*Pottery is the New Video*'. But the points are serious ones about gender, the nature of judgements and prizes, and the faddishness of what is lauded by the art world. Despite his assertions that he does not know the meaning in his work, he communicates with disarming eloquence.



Fig 9: Perry, G (2004) *Taste and Democracy*, glazed ceramic vase (Klein, p.221).

Perry's fascination with crafted objects was prevalent in his show and in the curatorship *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum in 2011/12. Here he mixed 30 of his original creations with a selection of pieces from the museum's collection, railing against the *glossy conceptualism* (Anonymous, 2011) of international-style art. He relishes the eclectic, as well as an object's individuality and its craftsmanship, above its assigned anthropological value. He too makes reference to Winnicott's concept of the *transitional object*

Transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the basis of initiation of experience. This early stage in development is made possible by the mother's special capacity for making adaptation to the needs of her infant, thus allowing the infant the illusion that what the infant creates really exists. (Winnicott, 1971 p.16)

Perry's childhood teddy bear is emboldened with the power and significance of a religious icon or reliquary.

This 'transitional object', he says, helped him survive a harrowing upbringing: 'All gods are like cuddly toys insofar as they are inanimate things onto which people project their ideas'. (Anonymous, The Economist, 2011)

The exhibition highlighted key aspects of Perry's working methodology which is very personal and autobiographical; one commentator called it *a walk around Grayson Perry's head* (Imagine, 2011). The exhibition exemplifies how his creativity habitually stems from a *visual, historic* (Artsnewspapertv, 2009) starting point and then he brings his own ideas to the artifacts he sources. 'I look at things and trust the intuition and make.. choices.' (Imagine, 2011).

The structures themselves have a resonance too:

The surface and shapes of his ceramic vessels are narrations of his own ideas and biography. They also much more directly have their own personalities and have, according to him, an inherent 'anthropomorphism, with their necks, shoulders, bellies and feet.' (Klein, 2009, p36).

Although renowned for his pottery, Perry also makes artwork with a variety of other mediums unified by an interest in traditional craft skills and the home-fashioned. His embroidered dress *Mother of all Battles* (fig.10) has, almost literally, embroidered layers of meaning. The battle is the painstaking craftwork that has gone into making the dress, the emblem of and homage to , the tireless mother whom he would have liked to have had. It is an ostentatious but, at the same time, homely embodiment of his transvestite alter-ego Claire, which simultaneously rails against the rape, torture, disembowelment, blanket bombing and viciousness of the Bosnian conflict.



Fig.10: Perry, G (1996) *The Mother of All Battles* 1996. (Klein, p.70)

His quilts (fig.11.) adorned with repeat patterns of motifs such as *phalluses ejaculating into anuses, with foliage made up of atomic explosions...fetuses and blobs of blood* (Klein, 2009) straddle an antithesis between the humble, homely medium and scorching social/political commentary. His motifs are far from gratuitous.



Fig. 11. Perry, G (1997) *Tree of Death* (Klien, p.105)

The materials Perry uses confront the accepted mediums of the art-world; they allude to normality and domesticity and at the same time question our value systems.

I also considered how Mona Hatoum uses objects to succinctly convey wider ideas and how she manages to transmute mundane objects like beds, doormats, chairs and cots, into sinister and dangerous versions of their former selves. The homely rug becomes a twisted coil of entrails; the welcome mat's bristles are supplanted with sharp pins. A bench is a grotesquely enlarged grater: a hospital screen a giant shredder (fig.12).



Fig. 12. Hatoum, M (2002) *Grater. Divide*

<http://images.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/monahatoumgraterdivide2002.jpg> (last Accessed 28th. August 2016)

The work *is meant to disrupt [the] idea of the home and what it means.* (Tusa, 2005) Her sculptures subvert our preconceptions about comfort and normality by skewing everyday domestic objects and thereby imbuing them with menace and danger. In doing so she provokes questions about gender, nurture, memory, abuse and violence.

Her pieces are carefully pared down to minimal components and stark combinations:

For me that was a, very great balance for me between kind of making a work that is visually very kind of concise and contained and minimal within, in its elements, using very few elements, at the same time reverberating with so many meanings. (Hatoum quoted in Tusa, 2005)

Although Hatoum's Palestinian background and exile are often cited, the artworks are not intended to comment on specific political situations or inequities, but rather have a generalized resonance in relation to exile, displacement and institutional violence:

It could be related to a number of people who are exiled, who are displaced, who suffer a kind of cultural or political oppression of, of any kind. (Antoni, 1998)

The sculptures by their very everyday domestic nature seduce their audience in and then they become complicit with the structure's inherent subterfuge and violence.

My work is always constructed with the viewer in mind. The viewer is somehow implicated or even visually or psychologically entrapped in some of the installations. The sculptures based on furniture are very much about the body too; they encourage the viewer to mentally project themselves onto the objects. (Hatoum quoted in Antoni, 1998)

I was interested in how Hatoum also used changes in scale to produce specific effects. In *Untitled* (fig.13) two chairs are placed facing each other, one big, one small. They are manufactured from rigid symmetrical mesh. Hatoum sets out to confound our understanding of the chair as comfortable and everyday. The materials she makes them from are quite literally uncomfortable but so is the confrontation on display. The big chair dominates the diminutive one. It pushes up uncomfortably close like an overbearing parent or teacher. The small chair is made in the same way as its dominator; it will grow up to overbear its successors in turn. The apparent simplicity of the pairing makes the relationship between them more intense. Hatoum describes this interplay:

The two chairs have an unequal but inescapable relationship. They are very angular, cold and cage-like, but at the same time there's a symbiotic relationship between them because they are so similar. (Brett, 1998, p.24).

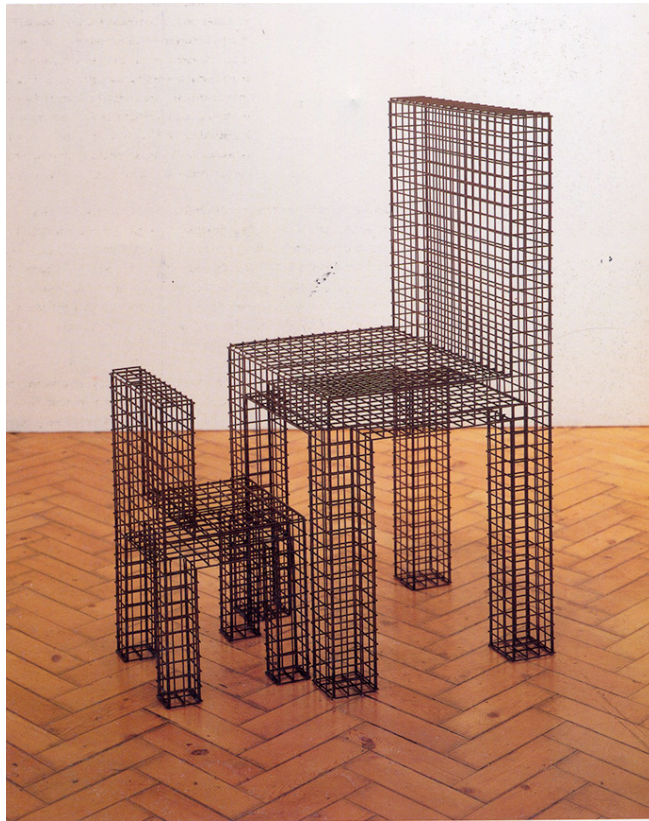


Fig 13: *Untitled 1992* Two steel wire mesh chairs. Mona Hatoum (Brett, 1997, p.24).

A number of Hatoum's works use the motif of a cot. Protection, homely maternal nurture, the care of the most fragile is alluded to by this structure but, in Hatoum's hands this is radically altered. In *Incommunicado* (fig. 14) the cot becomes a prison, the mattress replaced by rows of razor wire, which would do violence to a body rather than protect it:

*It has been stripped to the bare metal, which makes it cold and harsh, and instead of having a solid base to support the mattress, there are thin wires that have been stretched across the frame. It looks more like an egg-slicer, and you immediately associate it with a situation of danger and abuse. I called it *Incommunicado* to associate it with prisoners in solitary confinement. But also an infant in those situations has no ability to communicate about extremes of fear or pain. (Antoni, 1998).*

The sculpture's power lies in its disorientating, disquieting take on normality:

'I want to create a situation where reality itself becomes a questionable point where (people) have to reassess their assumptions and their relationship to things around them'. (Hatoum quoted in Said, 2000, p41)

At first glance it presents itself as almost plausible. It conjures up maternal love, sweetness, innocence; then we register its cold hospital sterility, and then its evocations of abuse. Again, Hatoum manages these conflicting ideas through simple juxtapositions and transpositions.



Fig. 14 Hatoum, M (1993) *Incommunicado* mild Steel and Wire

<https://www.magasin3.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/multimedia-26036-img.jpg>

(Last accessed 28th. August 2016).



Fig. 15. Shonibare,Y (2003) *Scramble for Africa* (Shonibare, 2008, p104)

I also considered Yinka Shonibare's work in reference to my own, as his sculptural work is richly laden with political, social and historical commentary. Mannequins dressed in period costumes cavort, hunt, conduct business, study and copulate. The fabrics, they wear are colourful, vibrant and clashing African textiles. With these strident juxtapositions Shonibare urges us to contemplate our colonial history and its inherent abuses and iniquities and we are reminded of issues such as slavery and of enforced migration. The Dutch wax fabric signifying 'Africa' but originating in Dutch Indonesia and produced in England, is an amusing commentary on notions of authentic and constructed identity.

In *Scramble for Africa* (fig.15) a group of mannequins have a heated debate around a boardroom table whose mahogany top has a map of Africa painted upon it. Their headless bodies preen, argue and jostle. They evoke the unashamed complacency, proprietary, and masculine arrogance of the colonial powers and attitudes of utter disregard for the peoples and cultures of the continent. The headless heads of state divide Africa without empathy and with impunity.

Shonibare's sculptures confound visions of Western etiquette, progressive culture and refined order, managing to pose larger questions on imperialism and domination. He deliberately references the mores of art history to adopt *the iconography of power to deconstruct power itself* (Downey, Shonibare, 2008, p.41). In his interpretation of Henry Raeburn's *Reverend Walker Skating on Duddinston Loch* his Reverend (fig. 16) becomes freed from cold cultural straightjackets with the addition of colourful African textiles. His three-dimensional rendition is meant as an irreverent and refreshing cultural alternative to the glum, pompous and austere.



Fig. 16. Shonibare, Y (2005) *Reverend Walker Skating on Duddinston Loch* (c.1795)
by Henry Raeburn and *Reverend on Ice* (Shonibare,2008, p98)

Shonibare imbues his sculptures with colourful irreverence but also manages to deliver controlled and powerful cultural and social commentary.

These artists and theorists provide challenging insights into the function, purpose and meaning of objects and the materials from which they are made. Their works offer a context for my interest in combining objects to create new resonances and narratives. They set up relationships between the literal and functional ,the conceptual and poetic, and create powerful modes of anthropomorphism.

At the commencement of my practical work for this doctorate study, I sourced specific objects and materials with nascent ideas in mind. I found a prosthetic leg on Ebay with the intention of making a sculptural commentary on what I considered to be a prevalent atmosphere of bellicosity in contemporary society particularly pertaining to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. I wanted to create a sculptural statement that honed down complex issues into a singular and arresting statement. On receiving the leg in the post, I investigated a succession of alternative configurations in my sketchbook. I also initiated a practice of photographing the leg and drawing on printouts, which engendered a wider variety of potential permutations (fig.17).



Fig. 17. Abrams, J (2012) *Diminution*– developmental process 2012 Sketchbook-log 1

I developed an idea which I gradually pared down to essential elements: a simple combination of a chair and prosthetic limb. The paring down was important for me, as I wanted the component elements to hold a focused and elemental tension, with an audience's mind instantly focused on the point of the piece. I scavenged a series of discarded chairs and one immediately felt appropriate for my envisaged structure. It emanated, , a very British 'waiting room' style that was functional, workaday and utterly bland. Bringing the pieces together to create *Diminution* (fig.18), I aimed to conjure a feeling of entrapment and solitude, with the chair standing in as a generalized

personification. I wanted it to insinuate that the fate attributed to this chair could relate to anyone. Its 'disability' is both personal but also an attribute of our collective jingoistic state.



Fig.18. Abrams, J (2012) *Diminution*. Prosthetic limb and chair amalgamation. 85 x 48 x 66cm.

On completing *Diminution*, I started to develop a related concept in which I envisaged developing a chair conjoined to a pair of crutches with the intention of expressing ideas of remembrance, solitude and the debilitating aftermath of conflict. I scoured online for an appropriate pair of crutches and then visualised a sequence of ideas by drawing on photographs of them in my sketchbook (fig.19). I eventually settled on a similarly pared down solution to my previous artwork where the crutches formed the back legs and high back to the chair. I wanted the result (fig.20) to appear utterly congruous, as if it had always meant to be integral yet at the same time disarmingly dissonant.

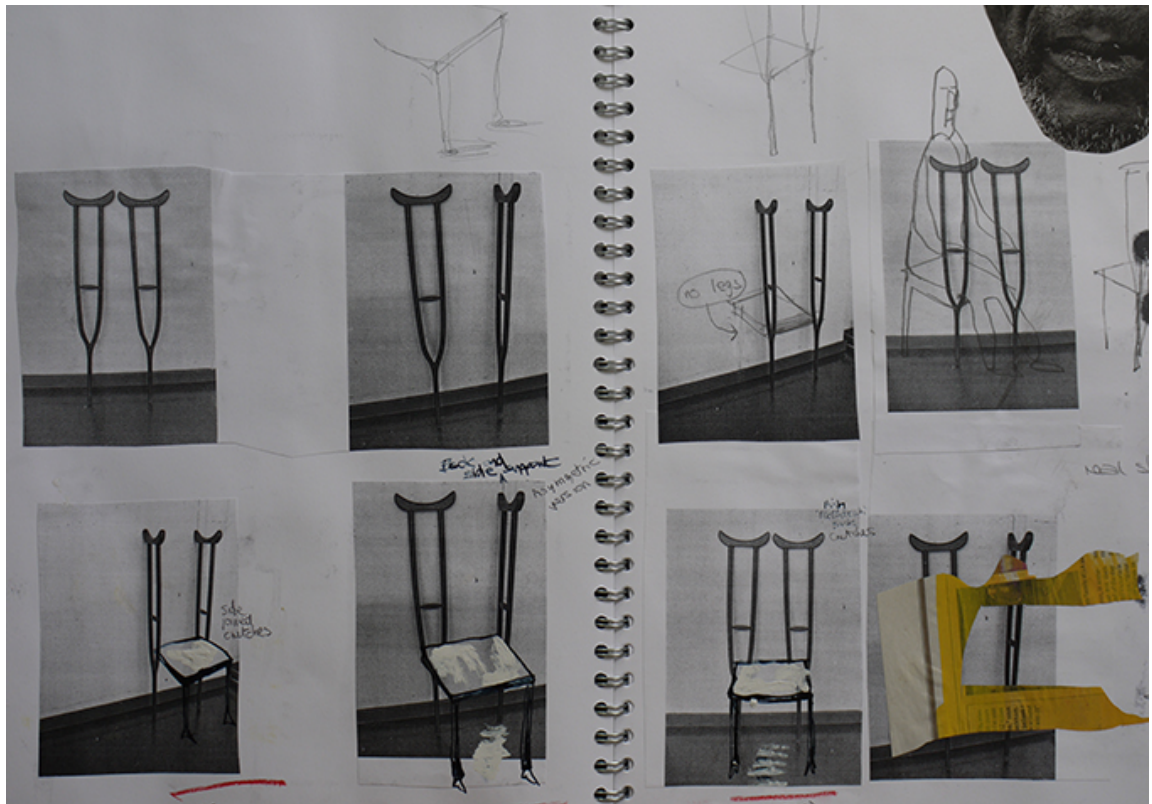


Fig. 19. Abrams, J (2012) *Crutch Chair*– developmental process 2012 Sketchbook-log 1



Fig.20. Abrams, J (2012) Crutch Chair. Salvaged Crutches and chair amalgamation. 120 x 46x 44cm.

I showed both pieces of sculpture at a *Work in Progress* seminar at UEL and in the *Doctorate Showcase exhibition* 2012 (fig.22) gathering valuable feedback from a range of respondents. Many found that the artworks intention had been poignantly achieved. However, some

queried the simplicity of the pairings and suggested adding additional elements to create more tension. One critical commentary was that the artwork too conveniently resided within a prevailing fashionable mode of *upcycling* and that the component parts, because of their age, lacked real pertinence to the contemporary issues that I wished to explore. The commentator suggested more contemporary chairs coupled with more contemporary ambulatory aids would be more relevant. Whilst appreciating this viewpoint, I felt the artefacts I had used did manage to allude to on-going personal histories and remembrance, and that because of this, they did retain a present day relevance. This input did however strengthen my resolve to further investigate aspects of material culture and look more into the chair in all its multifarious forms.



Fig.22. Abrams, J (2012) *Showcase Exhibition View*.

Crutchchair and other seated pieces.

THE MEANING OF THINGS

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Fig. 23. *Abrams, J (2013) Scorched* salvaged chair -cut and conjoined with singed wood 267 x 44x 46 cm.

Following on from this period of my study, I became more and more interested in using the chair motif to further explore themes of age, gender, sexuality and human fragility. I investigated theorists who had researched the nature of our relationships with the objects that we own in the domestic setting, as well as those who had looked into the various purposes and significance of the chair. I also researched a number of artist practitioners who had utilised objects and themes within similar domains to my own; notably Sarah Lucas and Hans Bellmer. In addition to this, in a much more focused manner, I visited exhibitions that had direct relevance to my study with the purpose of further contextualising my own creative work.

Sarah Lucas' sculptures are determinably lewd and confrontational. Her ribald treatments transform everyday objects into statements on sexuality and everyday life. Her work, first lauded in the 1990s 'Brit Art' scene, vented an angry response to what she perceived as the laddish and boorish culture in Britain at the time. She continues to pursue these themes today with similar humour and force. Her work shown at her solo show *SITUATION Absolute Beach man rubble* at the Whitechapel Gallery (2013), amongst other things, investigated contemporary attitudes to gender and sexuality. Her sculpture is full of glaring innuendos that expose, through clever combinations and placement of found and everyday objects, enigmatic contradictions on both misogynistic and misandrist behaviours. It is violent, brash and gratuitous work that concurrently rails against and celebrates the sexist, sordid and profane.

At first take, the sculpture *Au Naturel* (fig.24) appears frivolous, but then the onlooker comes to ponder its deeper intents. The mattress, slumped against the wall, is both redolent of domestic comfort and repose but also the site of sexual congress, illness and death. Its shabby and sunken stature evokes history, memories, age and wear. The ripe fruit emanating from it signify fertility but also immanent and inevitable decay. Lucas places sex, absurdity and transience in careful equivalence. Passion is destined to be momentary; all that survive it is the mattress and bucket, in stained memoriam. The anthropomorphised melon breasts protruding from the mattress are situated above a bucket whose opening gapes like an enormous vaginal orifice. A phallus is placed beside it, made up of cucumber and oranges. It pricks through: silly and slight in its contrast in scale. They become signs of male potency, insignificance and also

crassness. Her inspiration being real life observations and interactions such as when visiting a local market *the guy I'm buying it off winks when I'm buying it. Life is imbued with this continual innuendo...*(Friedman, 1994 p31.)



Fig. 24. Lucas, S (1994) *Au Naturel*. Mattress, water bucket, melons, oranges and cucumber
http://www.saatchigallery.com/aip/sarah_lucas.htm (Last accessed 28th. November 2013)

Clarrie Wallis notes in her essay 'In the Realm of the Senseless' on Lucas's joint show at the Tate (2004) that *through a process of transformation, of subtly altering everyday objects, Lucas...questions the way we perceive the world around us. This suggests an art historical lineage connecting Lucas's work to Richard Wentworth's transformation of discarded materials.* (Muir, p.99).

In another sculpture (fig.25), a homely dining chair has male underwear stretched over it and has a meat phallus protruding erect from its seat. The everyday objects are purposefully placed to *confront the ridiculousness of sexual stereotypes* (De Cruz, p.4). The male of the house sits and is served his dinner. He, in turn, serves up dominance and sex. Male libido is thus portrayed as perpetual and absurd yet ordinary and sturdy. The pants and vest

comically evoke a very British prudery combined with a licentious 'Carry On' masculine sexuality. The man about the house becomes preposterously brutish yet banal. The sculpture's title reinforces this duality with a double entendre that can be read both as a sordid act of fellatio or an expression of solid respectable steadfastness.



Fig. 25. Lucas, S (2000) *Tongue and Groove Always Goes Down Well*, chair, vests, pants.

De Cruz, G (2000) p.20.



Fig.26. Lucas, S (2000) *Absolute-Beach-Man-Rubble*. The Whitechapel Gallery.

Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2013/sep/30/sarah-lucas-whitechapel-gallery-in-pictures#/?picture=418650484&index=0> (Accessed: 11 December 2013).

I feel a real affinity for Lucas' contemplations on masculinity and I am interested how she develops her artistic outcomes to an effective excess. In her sculptures masculinity is often displayed as empowered and domineering, flippant yet strong. A huge plaster penis lies erect on top of a crushed car (fig.26), symbols at once of power, speed, destructive violence but also of absurdity. Frequently women are portrayed as submissive, subjugated and soft. They too have a crude carnality but they also are made to embody subservience and abject compliance. In *Bunny* (fig. 27) a female figure is positioned in 'a come and get me' open splay. Its soft stuffed stockinged legs exude a languid sexual desire yet, at the same time, Lucas sets up a tense and violent contradiction. Her soft libidinous form is sadistically clamped into and stretched over a hard and upright chair. The chair becomes a symbol of an everyday masculine domination and constriction.



Fig.27 Lucas, S (1997) *Bunny*, tights, plywood chair, clamp, kapok stuffing with wire.

Rosenthal,N (1998) p.119.

Lucas' astute use of objects is pivotal in the intention and power of the artworks she produces.

Lucas appears to be searching for the moment when dumb, everyday stuff is redeemed by its ability to provoke unlooked-for fusions of representation and metaphor. For Lucas, this turn to how matter and materials might connect to a truer sense of bodies and of being – sidestepping cliché and refusing the accessible language of stereotype that only conceals what it pretends to communicate – comes back to an austere commitment to the simplicity of materials and unembellished form: things that refuse to be other than they are, and in which the artistic intervention is what transforms them into something more than mundane (Charlesworth, 2013)

Whilst contemplating Lucas, I began to reconsider the work of Hans Bellmer in relation to my work. In an era of pervasive Internet pornography, Hans Bellmer's (1902-75) twisting female flesh forms and forthright sexual imagery still remain powerful and provocative. An inspiration, according to Frieze Magazine (Duncan, 1993) for a wide range of contemporary artists varying from Robert Gober to Matthew Barney and providing an indebted legacy for the likes of Louise Bourgeois, Bruce Nauman, Francis Bacon, and Frederick Sommer to fulfill. Other artists such as Jake and Dinos Chapman should perhaps be added to this list.

For Bellmer, his artwork aimed to deride the entrenched moral degeneracy in society: *'if my work is found to scandalise that is because, for me, the world is scandalous'* (Webb, p12), by means of an on-going fascination with the erotic *'All my work is erotic - it always has been... eroticism has always been of the greatest importance to me.'* (Webb, p1)

I was particularly interested in how, in his drawing, he adeptly employs paradoxical methodologies. He manages to depict licentious and violent extremes in a delicate and dainty manner. This contradiction enabled him to highlight his eras' moral prudery, casuistry, and its just-below-the-surface violence and hypocrisy. Reduced to copulating sexual parts and gaping orifices, the drawings shock in their bold and uninhibited sexuality with its aim of condemning and eviscerating notions of high moral correctitude. In *Untitled*, (fig.28) everyday objects are suffused with rampant libidinous desire. A humble bar room stool becomes an ejaculating penis. A lampshade transmogrifies to the folds of a vaginal opening, a chair leg a phallus and two chairs stacked together then imply copulation. The delicacy of the rendition of the drawing is deliberately an antithesis of the indelicacy of its content. Bellmer gives us an uncompromising view of male sexual violence that exemplifies wider societal violence. Drawing has always been a vital component of my artistic and psychological nature and during this period of study it has become more autobiographical and even more essential. I have, buoyed by looking at the likes of Bellmer, endeavoured to achieve a frankness in my own drawings, especially those confined within my A3 sketchbook notebooks.

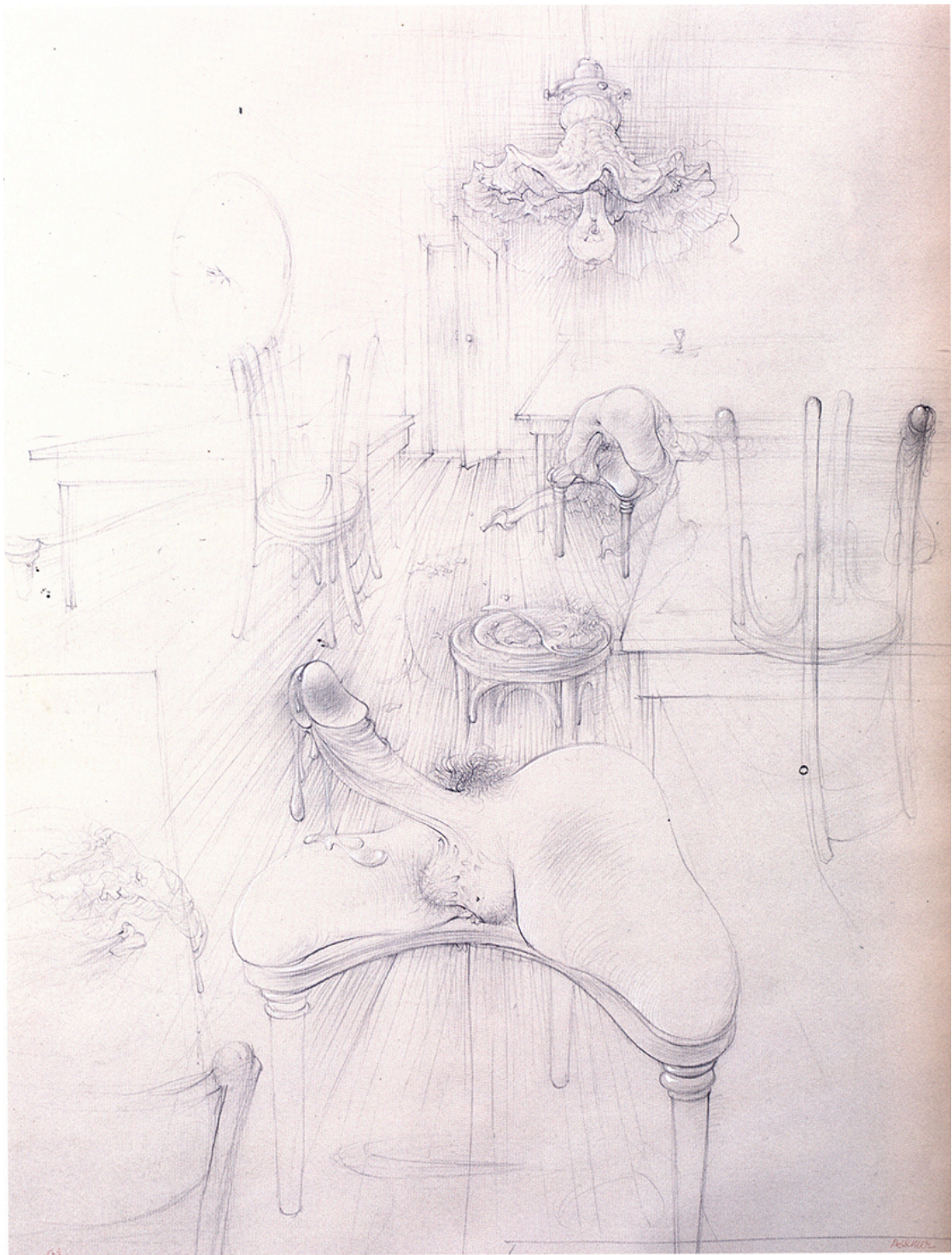


Fig.28 Bellmer, H (1963) *Untitled*. Semff, N (2006) p.220.

Bellmer's sculpture and photography was also of interest. In *The Machine-Gunneress in a State of Grace* (fig.29) soft, orbic, pink forms are juxtaposed with rigid machine manufactured hardness and implicit violence. The male gun support is inexorably conjoined to its female counterpart.. Eroticism and aggression entwined; a vision of sadistic gratification that alludes to a warped period of pleasure in savagery in Nazi Germany, and the idealisation of the perfect Aryan female form of the 'master race'.



Fig.29 Bellmer, H (1937/61) *The Machine-Gunneress in a State of Grace*. Semff, N (2006) p.14.

The work is vehement in its intensity and sardonic humour. It rails against the censorious and urges the viewers to confront their own moral boundaries. Its virulence, its mix of drawing and sculpture and its dark satire sits well as an adjunct of and inspiration for my own artistic practice.

As objects became an ever more central mainstay of my artistic endeavour I researched theoretical work that could assist in lending them context. In *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the self*, (1981) theorists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton address the sociological status and meaning of common day objects within the home environment. Their study led them to interview 80 American families in the 1970s, and analysing the results brought them *to see materialism in a somewhat new light*

(p.246). Probing how household objects are inherently loaded with symbolic meaning, they discovered how these meanings changed for different age and gender groups,.

They note that objects have transient meanings which fluctuate throughout a person's life:

When we confront a thing, we usually do so in a context of cultural meanings that help us interpret the object. As existential philosophers are fond of saying, the network of cultural meanings is 'always already there,' mediating the transactions. At the same time, we believe that new signs are constantly being created by people throughout their lives, some embodying enduring meaning in new forms, others expressing new meanings in forms that can be traditional or unprecedented. (p.15)

and personal interpretations also hold significant resonance:

But it is more difficult to admit that the things one uses are in fact part of one's self; not in any mystical or metaphorical sense but in cold, concrete actuality. My old living room chair with its worn velvet fabric, musty smell, creaking springs, and warm support has often shaped signs in my awareness. These signs are part of what organizes my consciousness, and because my self is inseparable from the sign process that constitutes consciousness, that chair is as much part of my self as anything can possibly be. (p.15)

In their analysis of peoples' attitudes to furniture, utilitarian qualities were found to be of relatively low concern. Their research found that memories, style and experience counted more for the individual:

They tend to be considered special for a limited range of reasons: because they embody memories and experiences; because they are signs of the self and of one's family. (p.62).

In other words, respondents in their research cherished furniture items seldom for reasons of practical usage but for their evocative value, their reflection of the ego or social status. Belonging or 'kinship' was found to be of significant bearing to their research group. 82% cherished particular objects because they reminded them of a close relative. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton tabulated results of this research (fig.30) exhibiting how particular objects held different importance and values to the studied group.

Table 3.3. *Distribution and percentages of meaning classes making up the object categories*

	<i>N</i> %		<i>N</i> %		<i>N</i> %		<i>N</i> %	
	Furniture		Visual art		Sculpture		Musical instruments	
Memories	98	15.4	84	15.6	73	18.0	25	10.4
Associations	35	5.5	28	5.2	47	11.6	8	3.3
Experiences	69	10.8	47	8.8	36	8.9	52	21.7
Intrinsic Qualities	56	8.8	86	16.0	46	11.3	8	3.3
Style	80	12.5	56	10.4	47	11.6	15	6.3
Personal Values	27	4.2	24	4.5	22	5.4	21	8.8
Utilitarian	34	5.3	1	.2	1	.3	5	2.1
Self	106	16.6	54	10.1	47	11.6	57	23.8
Immediate Family	98	15.4	84	15.6	58	14.3	41	17.1
Kin	18	2.8	6	1.1	10	2.5	2	.8
Nonfamily	17	2.7	67	12.5	19	4.7	6	2.5
Total	638	100.0	537	100.0	406	100.0	240	100.0

	Photos		Televisions		Stereos		Books		Plants	
Memories	79	26.7	1	.6	16	7.6	29	11.3	7	4.1
Associations	5	1.7	5	2.8	7	3.3	22	8.6	7	4.1
Experiences	27	9.1	56	31.5	59	28.1	50	19.5	36	21.3
Intrinsic Qualities	49	16.6	4	2.3	4	1.9	10	3.9	13	7.7
Style	8	2.7	2	1.1	7	3.3	3	1.2	24	14.2
Personal Values	7	2.4	7	3.9	4	1.9	37	14.5	25	14.8
Utilitarian	2	.7	20	11.2	17	8.1	14	5.5	1	.6
Self	22	7.4	60	33.7	68	32.4	58	22.7	39	23.1
Immediate Family	77	26.0	17	9.6	21	10.0	19	7.4	14	8.3
Kin	13	4.4	2	1.1	2	1.0	3	1.2	1	.6
Nonfamily	7	2.4	4	2.3	5	2.4	11	4.3	2	1.2
Total	296	100.0	178	100.0	210	100.0	256	100.0	169	100.0

Fig.30 Csikszentmihalyi, M (1981) p. 88. Distribution and percentages of meaning classes making up object categories, table.

They also recognised that these results could be unravelled further repeating the analysis with different age groups, cultures and gender. Given my interests in gender and my previous research into portrayals and ideas around of masculinity, their findings in this subject area were of particular interest. They found that men ascribed objects of significance that diverged from women (fig. 31). Women had a greater disposition towards the familial, and objects that implied nurturing whilst men leant towards those that held *tangible evidence of prowess, such as sports equipment or trophies* (p.111). Whilst they again

recognised that their conclusions cluster into generalities, their research showed a significant leaning towards prevailing gender stereotypes.

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Table 4.3. *Most frequently named objects mentioned by each sex*

Males (N = 141)	Percentage	Females (N = 174)	Percentage
1. Furniture	32.6 ^a	1. Furniture	38.5
2. TV	29.1	2. Photographs	30.5
3. Stereos	28.4	3. Visual art	27.0
4. Visual art	24.1	4. Sculpture	25.9
5. Musical instruments	20.6	5. Books	24.1
6. Books	19.9	6. Plants	23.0
7. Sports equipment	17.7	7. Musical instruments	22.4
8. Collectibles	14.9	8. Plates	20.1
9. Photographs	14.2	9. Appliances	16.7
10. Beds	12.1	10. Stereos	16.1
11. Pets	11.3	11. Beds	14.9
12. Sculpture	10.6	12. TV	14.4
13. Vehicles	9.9	13. Glass	12.8
14. Appliances	9.9	14. Textiles	12.6
15. Trophies	8.5	15. Collectibles	12.1

^aPercentage of respondents mentioning at least one object in each category.

Fig. 31. Csikszentmihalyi, M (1981) p. 107. Most Frequently named objects mentioned by each sex, table.

Men were observed valuing objects of 'action' (cars, tools, appliances) where women valued more contemplative items such as family photographs and objects relating to memories and personal relationships.

The differentiations of understanding of domestic objects and their environs between old and young were also found to be of significance. Young people habitually considered objects actively as modes of enjoyment or comfort, whilst older people consider them in a more passive way as evocations of relationships, memories and experience. The older we get possessions that represent *memories, relationships, family and values become more prominent* (p.119).

The actual domestic space was also observed as pertinent in a variety of ways. Reminiscent of the prescient response by Frank Lloyd Wright to Le Corbusier's adage 'The House is a machine for living in', who added 'Yeah, just like a human heart is a suction pump.' they note that the importance and resonance of 'The Home as symbolic environment' (p.121.). Space, again, moves away from the solely utilitarian needs of shelter and warmth but becomes a projection of the inhabitants' self. To men the home was seen as valedictory of his accomplishments. Its scale, its accoutrements and its additions, such as kitchens and bathrooms had importance. For women the home was more of an emotional concept expressing personal relationships and interactions.

In addition to this, objects in the home can delineate his or her social status. Their research findings show how we project ideas of hierarchy through our presentations of objects such as *expensive furniture, gadgets, cars* (p.142).

Galen Cranz, in his book *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design* (2000) concurs with these themes adding points on ethnicity, education and religious affiliation:

And the home is the place where people communicate their social identity. This is connected not just to income but to what work one does for a living, how one chooses to spend money, one's educational level, travel experience, family and religious affiliations.
(Cranz, p.48)

At this juncture I started to research more about ideas and themes on one of the primary domestic objects that I have employed as a central theme within my artwork. *Chair* (2011) by Anne Massey, explores a range of subjects looking at ideas on power and domination, views on comfort, craftsmanship and design and then she concludes with how artists have developed the chair as a motif or theme. She looks at how chairs, can be made by the craftsperson as individual pieces or limited editions, be 'designer' statements, or mass-produced to fulfil a range of different functions, and also can carry a wider significance as a cultural artefact and signifier. Throughout life we use a succession of different chairs that support us physically but also metaphorically. They too, are not solely objects for repose and support. They offer *a glimpse into our collective ideas about status and honor, comfort and order, beauty and sufficiency, discipline and relaxation* (Cranz, p.15). For the artist, they can

be potent symbols with an array of meanings that stray among themes as varied as authority and dominance, gender status and sex and submission.

The utility of the chair is seemingly obvious; The toddler's buggy takes the weight of, and conveys, its seated user; The wheelchair supports the aged or disabled body; The toilet supports us as we carry out our bodily functions. Chairs are entwined with our physical being. They define our stance and posture in our increasingly sedentary occupations and lifestyles. They hold us as we slump whilst watching television, sit eating our meals, wait at the dentist and work at the office. They are designed with anthropometric and ergonomic consideration. They should be of appropriate size and carry particular weight. However, we forget that these are relatively modern inventions and interventions that we now have come to understand as necessities. Before the impact of modernity chairs were almost solely used by aristocracy (Massey. p.16.).

Also a relatively modern concept is that the chair is integral to our comfort and repose, but Massey notes that to sit on a chair is not particularly suited to our anatomical make-up and that our sedentary lifestyles can result in a whole variety of back and joint problems.

Upholstery and cushioning of the chair can also express ideas on comfort. Soft padding does not necessarily equate with soft repose, floral patterns with warmth and ease. Upholstery, surface texture and pattern are however, important signifiers of these. They equally express their owner's taste and social standing.



Fig.32. Scarff, O (2012). *The British Throne*. Getty Images <http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/newsphoto/pageboys-stand-by-as-britains-queen-elizabeth-ii-sits-on-news-photo/144057328>. Accessed 14 April 2014.

Another significant purpose of the chair is the expression of status, power, dominance and control. Throughout history it has *reflected the status of the individual who commissioned and used it...whether pharaoh, maharaja, pope or emperor, the chair was reserved largely for the elite* (p. 16).

Chairs express hierarchy. The chairperson is pre-eminent in an organisation. The throne presides over a nation (fig.32). Massey explores how artists have consistently used and subverted this idea. The throne of the Mozambican sculptor Cristóvão Canhavato (Kester) (fig.33) is fashioned from decommissioned weaponry that have been exchanged for agricultural and construction tools to make pointed stabs at hierarchical power. Status, power, violence and redemption all entwined in a single artistic statement.



Fig.33. Canhavato, C(2001). *Throne of Weapons*

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/extraordinary-stories/highlights/throne-weapons> (Last accessed 25th. April 2014).

Massey also reminds her reader of another incarnation of dominance and control by using the example of Andy Warhol's images of the electric chair which express *the ultimate symbol of premeditated, deliberate killing and execution on behalf of society* (p.202). The chair becomes both a homely reminder but also its antithesis.

Sex and sexuality, we are reminded, can also be expressed through using the chair motif. The infamous photograph of Christine Keeler provocatively straddling a chair remains notorious in the public imagination. This glamorous image manages to coyly titillate but also to hide, in plain view, a vast mons pubis (fig.34).

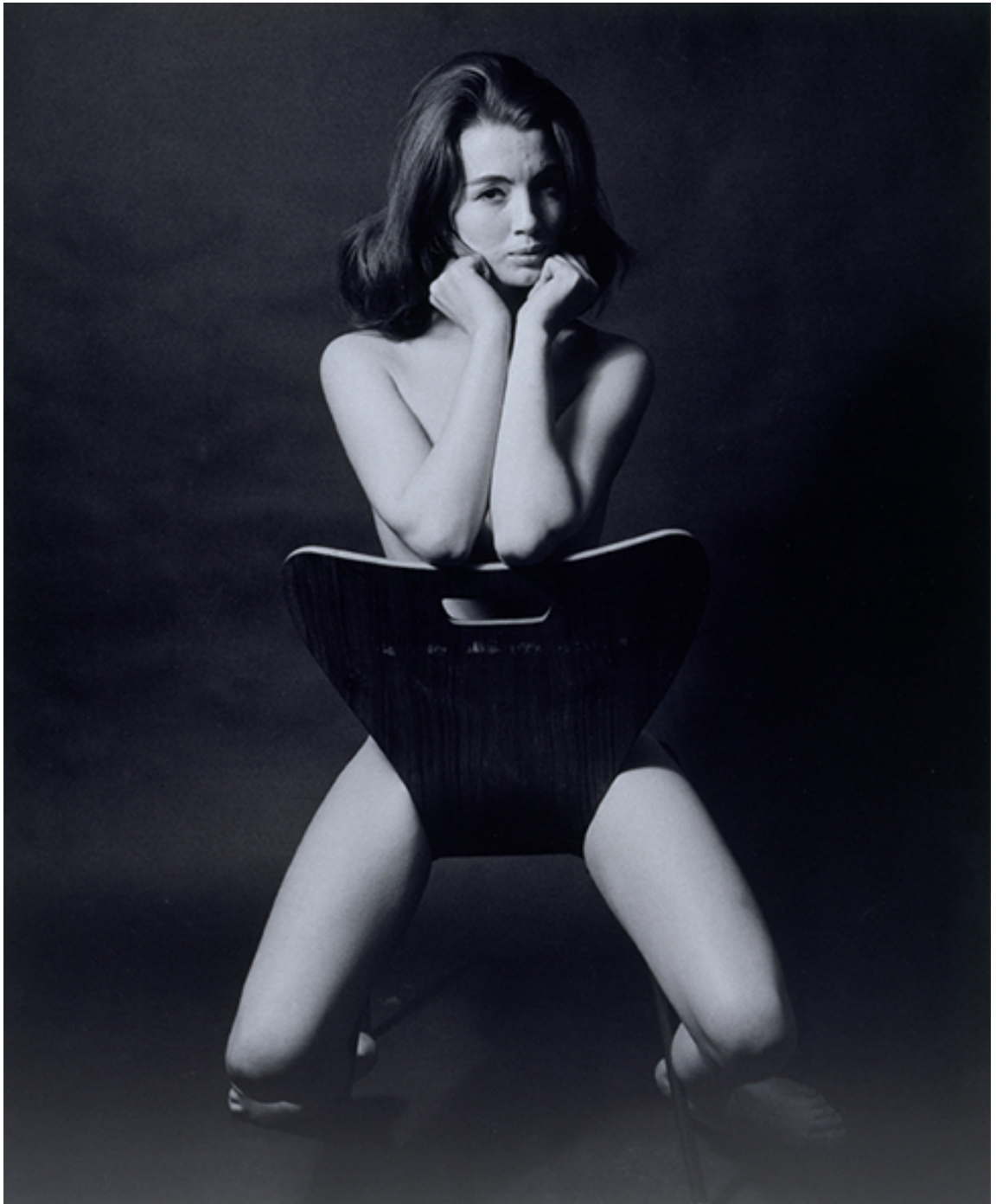


Fig.34. Morley, L (1963) Christine Keeler, Gelatin-silver print. Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Lewis Morley.
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/christine-keeler-photograph-a-modern-icon/> (Last accessed 15 April 2014).

The work of Allen Jones provokes Massey to ruminate on issues pertaining to forniphilia and she then moves on from his work to consider the *Bear Chair* (fig.35) of Edwin and Nancy Reddin Kienholz as *one of the most controversial uses of chair in modern Western art* (p.199). Sex becomes paedophilia, bestiality and more. The chair both imprisons the doll figure and allows the bear to elevate himself to her usual stature, to pier at his own visage and daub the slogan 'IF YOU EVER TELL I'LL HURT YOUR MAMA REAL BAD'.



Fig.35 Reddin Kienholz (1991) *Bear Chair*.

http://31.media.tumblr.com/17527fcd6272b00bb0518e7b63ab9246/tumblr_mrlnd5uByR1r7s5hko1_1280.jpg

Accessed 25 April 2014.

These strands of research ran alongside my development of a series of maquettes and artworks and proved useful in engendering new approaches and methodologies. I intended *Scorched* (fig.23), with its inverted and elongated female legs, to be redolent of stifled sexuality and domesticity. The height and stature of the sculpture became totemic, a flag to the issues I wished to express.

The salvaged dining chair had a previous life that I chose to anthropomorphise. It had had in my mind a solid, 'dinner-party', suburban respectability, that had gradually been usurped through time as tastes changed around it. I imagined that it had been gradually relegated through the domestic setting, consigned to the back room and then finally became a device for doing the odd job of painting around the house and finally thrown into a skip where I retrieved it, scuffed and paint-splattered. This degeneration for me,

could hint at the ageing and changing of an imagined female householder: her sexual identity and desirability confronted with age and rebuttal. I deliberately wanted the scorched inner thighs of the legs to jar against the scratched patina of the abandoned chair. The chair and its imagined history is intended to be both a self-portrait and portrait of my mother.

Its metal screw bolts (fig. 36) conjure her hip operation. Once active, beautiful, young and strong, she is now slowed by age and decay, her prosthetic hip screwed in painfully. I wanted to exemplify pathos at life's cruel and inexorable trajectory towards disintegration.



Fig.36. Abrams,J (2013) *Scorched*. Rear detail of wooden back-legs joined with 4 wing-nuts.

My developmental drawings for this chair help explain my working methodologies. These consist of a large number of investigative sketches that integrate a number of themes and

possibilities. The ones I consider the most successful in expressing these ideas (fig.37) are then developed through to working drawings. To assist in this process these are periodically combined drawings with photos of the chairs I have sourced. I also built small-scale maquettes to try out some of the key forms that I was envisaging. These tests became effective ways of trying out a number of permutations and assisted in, quite literally, solidifying my thoughts (fig.38).



Fig.37. Abrams, J (2013) Ideas Sketch Book 2 *Scorched* developmental drawings.



Fig.38. Abrams, J (2013) One of a series of maquettes for *Scorched* and *Scotched* sculptures.

At this juncture, I visited The Royal Academy in London (January 2014), where I saw Bill Woodrow's exhibition. I was interested in how he playfully dissects household objects, setting up a series of paradoxes and visual metaphors. A Hoover sucks up, or spews out, its component parts (fig.39); a kettle is spliced to reveal its inner anatomy. Everyday objects become anthropomorphised and dissected like human cadavers. Other items are cut to transmogrify into different entities. A dual-washtub's metal housing is cut and bent to exude an orbiting space satellite. Woodrow attempts to conjure jocular ideas around the rapid evolution in technology in our society. The washtub, the washing machine, thence the spacecraft: where next? I found the narratives within his sculptures refreshingly direct and thought provoking and I resolved to consider my own in light of this work.



Fig. 39. Woodrow, B (1979) *Hoover Breakdown*, Upright vacuum cleaner, wooden replica vacuum cleaner

http://www.billwoodrow.com/dev/sculpture_by_letter.php?page=2&i=17&sel_letter=h

(Last accessed 27th. January 2014).

On completing my *Scorched* chair, I proceeded to conceive a second 'sister' chair to further elucidate my theme. I envisaged this chair to be entirely scorched, and then conjoined with

a jettisoned dining chair in a similar fashion to the previous chair (fig .40). I intended the two chairs to stand opposite each other, totemic reiterations of this emotional turmoil.



Fig 40. Abrams, J(2014) *Scotched* (detail). Burnt wood. *Scotched* and *Scorched* together (Interim Exhibition, UEL 2014).

These sculptures also are ruminations on my own physiological insecurities and fragilities and are attempts to communicate and solidify them as tangible forms. Increasingly, I consider my chairs as projections of my own ego, history and psychology. The elongated legs, amongst their other meanings, have phallic connotations. They thrust upwards as expressions of my own maleness and libido. The average and unexceptional stature of the domestic conjoined with an ostentatious protrusion. The chair represents the self and is an expression of a personal dichotomy: ordinariness and isolation versus ego and virility; repression and self-esteem rendered as sculpture.



Fig.41 Abrams, J (2013). Rough for *In Commemoration* -roughs in Ideas *Sketchbook Workbook 2*

These artworks led to a succession of subsequent ideas which I then deliberated upon through a series of drawings in my *Sketchbook Workbook 2*. I had found a cluster of walking sticks in a seaside junk shop and I wanted to use them as part of a chair. I considered a range of options but a single stick piercing a chair (fig.41 far right) held, for me, the most resonance. It succinctly got to the essence of what I wanted to project, managing to not only represent personal remembrance (that of my ebullient and characterful maternal grandfather) but also to evoke a more generalist reflection on age and death. I subsequently manufactured this piece after sourcing an appropriate chair (fig.42).

The sculpture also developed as a projection of my self - my maudlin insecurities and fears of age and decrepitude. I received a range of feedback on this artwork with one respondent describing it as a *memento mori*. I found this a very suitable descriptor and one which I had in mind when devising another chair with mirror (fig.43). This was put together in a much more spontaneous manner, and aimed to be an ancillary piece to confront a viewer with their own ruminations of self. The seat invites repose but the precarious mirror provides an inherent tension: will it slip and break; can you confront your own ego?



Fig.42. Abrams, J (2013) *Remembrance Chair*. Sourced stick and salvaged chair.



Fig. 43. Abrams, J (2013) *Mirror Chair*. Chair and mirror.

In the development of these artworks, my process was to fashion a number of smaller chair sculptures to explore my themes. In *Seated Male* (fig. 44), I rendered a male torso headless with the intention to make the personal themes raised applicable universally. It determines to invite a sitter towards it but then confront them with their own views on gender, frailty and sexuality. Sitting on, or envisaging sitting on, the roughly hewn sculpture of the male body with its protruding genital intends to grapple with the audiences' attitudes to masculinity and male power. The decision is dominance or subordination: it is up to personal interpretation. The frailty implied by the walking stick and the crude joints and fastenings attempt to express a disintegration of traditional male roles and stereotypes.



Fig 44. Abrams, J (2013) *Seated Male* . Salvaged wood. 73x 35x 46 cm.

A variety of other male stools and chairs were devised and manufactured in differing scales many attempting to elucidate themes concerning maleness and male insecurity. In *Straight Up*, a salvaged stool was given a high back that was cut in the shape of a male torso (fig.45) with an erect phallus cut out of it to show potency but also, by its absence, lost power and dominance. This motif was also replicated on a smaller scale *Exhibit1* (Fig.46) but then placed in a bell jar with the dual purpose of consigning machismo and a personal libido to the status of a museum relic.



Fig 45. Abrams,J (2014) *Straight Up*. Salvaged kitchen stool and painted hardboard. 2mx 32cmx32cm.

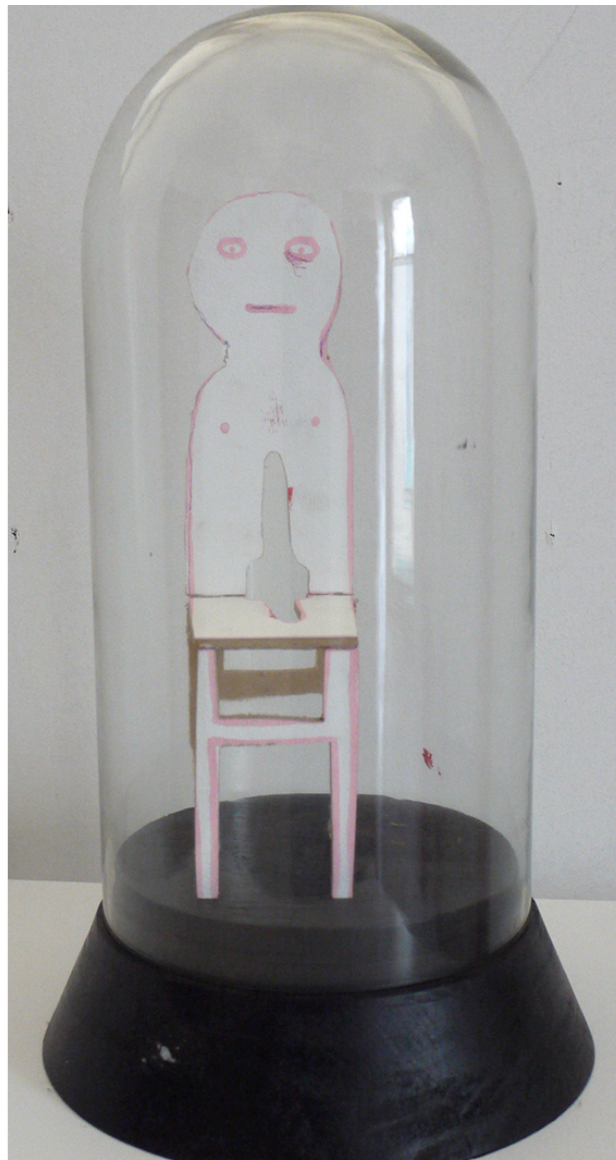


Fig. 46 Abrams,J (2014) *Exhibit I* Salvaged wood sculpture (30cm)in bell jar.

I chose to exhibit the two tall high burnt legged chairs as well as the *Straight Up* stool based chair (fig.47) at an Interim exhibition at UEL in March 2014, seeking to see these chairs in a gallery setting and garner feedback. There was a helpful discussion about the merits of the artworks and also their meanings. In addition to this there was debate on the positioning and spacing of the sculptures and whether or not a dynamic interrelationship between them had been created. There was also a useful debate on how the chairs, by their nature, are invitations to the viewer to sit, yet contradictorily, as artworks, they seem to repel this urge. I embraced this innate tension within the structures and resolved to develop these themes more in subsequent artworks.

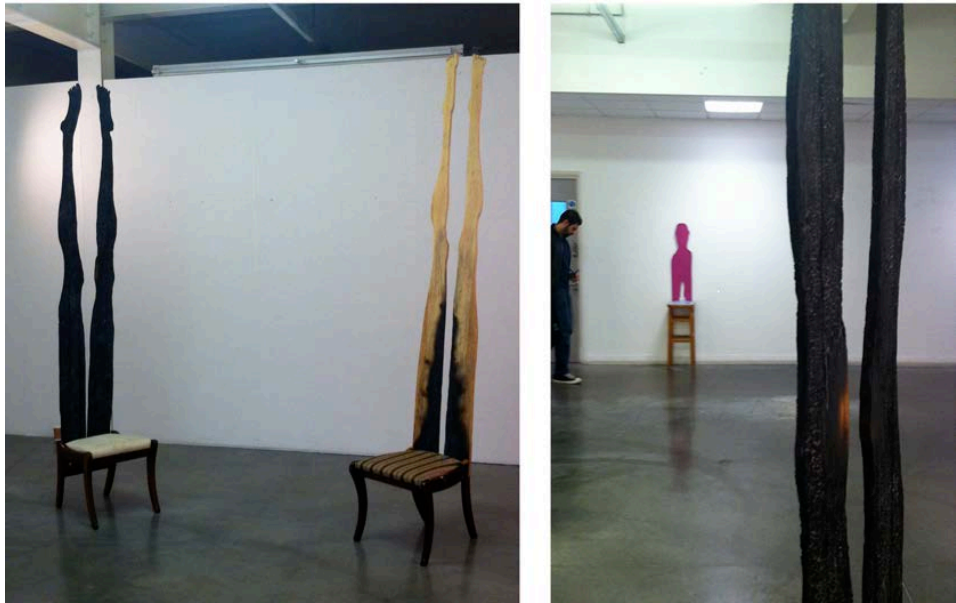


Fig.47. Abrams,J (2014). Exhibition view. UEL, London.

Later that year at the Doctorate Showcase exhibition 2014 (fig.48), I tested alternative configurations for my pieces, choosing to exhibit just one of my high scorched chairs (*Scorched*, 2013), my *Remembrance Chair*, *Mirror Chair* alongside a towered sculpture comprising of my oldest son's shoes showing his growth through the years. The ensuing group discussion touched on a number of points about my show and the decisions I had made in choosing its contents and their placement. There was also a valuable discussion on the merits of each artwork but also pointed advice, from one respondent, to make a more pronounced exploration within my doctoral research that highlighted a more experimental and divergent approach. He felt that the outcomes in this research period too closely mirrored the explorations of the previous year. This advice proved pivotal for me.



Fig.48. Abrams, J (2014). Exhibition View. *Scorched*, *Remembrance Chair* and shoe sculpture.

UEL Showcase Exhibition.

STUFF & PSYCHOANALYSIS

2014-2015



Fig.49. Abrams, J (2014). *Stage*. Acrylic on Canvas . 91cmx 91cm.

During the subsequent period of study, I made fewer sculptural artefacts and instead my practice diverged into the creation of more paintings and collaged artworks. These images, whose origins were the working drawings and paintings for sculptures, gradually became more significant to me as they became less like preparatory designs and more like finished artistic statements. They managed, at this juncture, to retain more immediate emotional and visceral potency than I felt I had achieved with some of my sculptural forms. I contextualised this body of work by looking at artists and theorists whom I felt were relevant. I studied the photographs and films of Melanie Bonajo, the sculptures and paintings of Gao Lei and contemplated the contemporary relevance of Lynn Chadwick. I visited a wide range of relevant and inspirational exhibitions not least the Anselm Kiefer and Allen Jones exhibitions at the Royal Academy in London. I continued my investigations into aspects of ownership of material objects by examining the writings of Daniel Miller and dug deeper into considering the psychological underpinnings of my work through Maria Walsh's *Art & Psychoanalysis* (2013).



Fig.50. Bonajo, M (2009) *As Thrown Down From Heaven*.

http://www.re-title.com/public/newsletters/21_May_09_-_Photography,_Film_&Video_0.htm.

(Last accessed 21st. August. 2014).

Melanie Bonajo's work held a particular significance at this stage of my research and I was interested in how in her collection of photographs *Furniture Bondage* (fig. 50, 51 and 52), she conjoins everyday domestic objects with the naked female form to create potent statements on exposure, domesticity and gender. Bonajo uses sculpture, performance, installation and photography to produce stark and thought-provoking pieces. Her female subjects are contorted and trussed amongst domestic paraphernalia such as ladders, mops and buckets. Her subject is, quite literally, bound within her role as sexual object and housewife drudge. Bonajo keeps faces hidden to lend a universality and anonymity to the women: they are subjugated, robbed of identity, personality and voice.

The nudeness addresses the vulnerability of the human when [taking] away [from] the image, that part of the identity that belongs to the public domain. The head is turned away because the figure is not about the individual portrayed on the picture, it is an archetype, it should be viewed as such. This aspect is emphasized by its anonymity. (Grider, 2008).



Fig.51. Bonajo, M (2009) *Furniture Bondage*.

http://www.re-title.com/public/newsletters/21_May_09_-_Photography,_Film_&Video_0.htm.

(Last accessed 21st. August. 2014).

The harsh studio lighting that Bonajo employs also helps to emphasize these issues by producing a mundanely dispassionate and sterile atmosphere. It has both the brutal 'every glaring detail' of pornography and the no-nonsense particularity of an instructional manual. Her ironic delivery makes the content still more affecting.

The contortions she presents us with are not aimed to stimulate sexual arousal but instead are meant as uncomfortable reminders of some of the unremitting iniquities and indignities suffered by women. The bodies are posed to show a limp resignation to this fate.



Fig.52. Bonajo, M (2009) Furniture Bondage

<http://chicagoartreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/melanie-bonajo-katia.jpg> .

(Last Accessed 23rd. August 2014).

Bonajo, perhaps counter-intuitively, professes that she does not *see this work as a feminist piece of art at all* (Grider) but something different:

It is way more personal and at the same time related more to the abstract level of the soul-consciousness of man which illuminates matter, instead of from a gender point of view, looking at it from this perspective would always be interpreted as opposing to men and that is not what it is about. I believe in equal rights, social, political, and economical, but I don't believe in equal roles, I think men and women have both very specific qualities that are not gender crossable and therefore man and women function better in gender related places within society although I do think exceptions make the rules and that every individual should have the freedom to choose whatever they function in best (Grider).

Bonajo is also making other points about arousal, exposure and shame with these images:

We are more naked in public [than] ever before. The border between private and public interests me. Especially how we define our comfort zone. What are contemporary territories of intimacy? What are the rules? Who is in the game? Where does participation stop? (Mandel, 2013).

According to Wyatt Niehaus, Bonajo works in a beguilingly polarized manner:

Bonajo's images are locked in a middle ground between self-aware escapism and a poignant critique of modern living- this dichotomy is what leads viewers in and at the same time, keeps them at a distance. Is this the purpose of Bonajo's work? Does she seek to alienate us from her images as a way to provoke us to examine the alienation we experience in our own lives? At this point in contemporary art, this is a tired trope. There is no shortage of image-makers who ruminate endlessly on man's alienation from nature. This has been a persistent narrative since the advent of industrialization. So is Melanie Bonajo merely playing into this worn out line of post-industrial criticism? It doesn't feel immediately clear that this is the case. If anything, Melanie's work is commenting on the trope itself and not on the questions it raises. (Niehaus, 2011)



Fig.53. Lei, G (2014) *Windows*, Stainless Steel, fabric. Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei. 1200x 300x 300cm.

Gao Lei's artistic productions were also of particular relevance at this juncture. I had had the opportunity to see his *Windows* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei (2014) and I was interested in how he curated different spheres of practice side by side. His paintings, photographs and his object-based sculptures were displayed in close proximity and this complementary practice felt harmonized and congruent. This lent me more confidence to conceive putting my own two and three-dimensional pieces together in future exhibitions.

One of the Lei's consistent themes is *how authority has shaped our surroundings* (MOCA Exhibition Video, 2014). To express this theme, he employs a range of different creative strategies ranging from small-scale 'peep-hole' structures, through large-scale amalgamations of three-dimensional objects and sculptures, to paintings and digitally manipulated photography.

Outside the exhibition hall he displayed large flagpoles flying conjoined flags based on the Microsoft Windows logo (fig.53). The artwork, aimed to show a powerful and preeminent global conglomerate quite literally at its peak, but also how ubiquitous, dominant and invasive its technological products are. The flag motif is at once powerful and totemic whilst also bland, forgettable and absurd: a proud colonial standard fluttering for the moment, but destined for inexorable demise.

Lei's sculpture provokes by managing to be distant, clinical and austere at the same time as having a pervading ominous and intimidating atmosphere. By combining dissonant objects, illuminated by theatrical lighting, he creates menacing environments that engender thoughts of violent state repression and claustrophobia. In *T-3217* (fig.54) he transmogrifies a set of playground swings by supplementing each seat cage with cast metal pelvises. The displacement manages to transform a motif that should embody innocent child's' play into an evocation of sex, painful childbirth and finally mortality and from this emerges in the viewer's mind contemplations of anonymizing and forbidding industrial manufacture processes. The materials Lei utilizes are carefully chosen. Each pelvis is cast in different metals which lends still more layers of interpretation to the piece. We start to consider different values we place on individuals in society. There is also an allusion to how precious metals are unrelentingly mined, exploited and fought over in a grim parody of a childish game.



Fig.54 Lei, G (2012) *T-3217* Stainless Steel Water Pipes, bronze, copper, stainless steel and aluminum.
MOCA, Taipei, exhibition view.

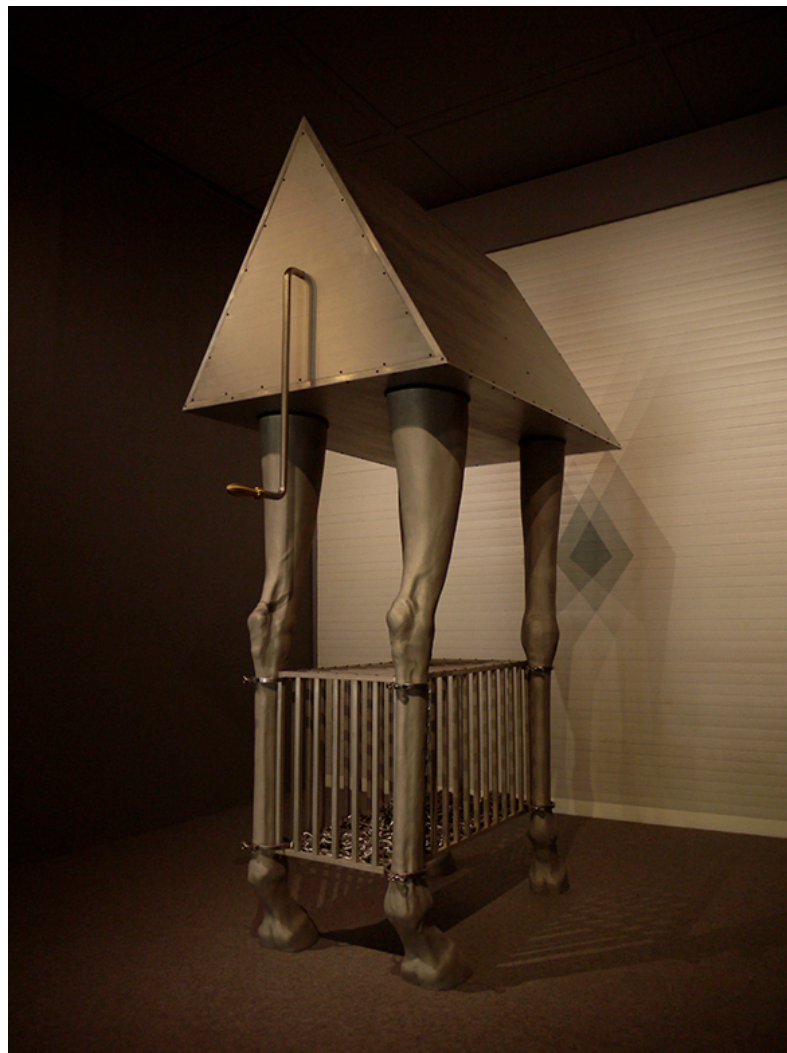


Fig.55 Lei, G (2012) *M-275* Aluminum, iron-chain, and copper handle.
MOCA, Taipei, exhibition view.

The odd juxtaposition of components in *M-275* (fig. 55) at first seem wholly absurd. However, on further contemplation, the giraffe, a cage, a wind up pyramid, some chains, start to evoke a succession of interconnecting metaphorical interpretations. The graceful yet awkward shape of the giraffe, forged in metal, alludes to the natural world being usurped by the remorseless demands of industrialization, reminding the viewer of the destruction of natural habitats and species. Wind it up and this mechanized sham will ponderously emulate its almost extinct ancestor. In turn, as the viewer, we are reminded that we are all complicit in this destruction and are chained and caged into this inevitable equation. The pyramid motif also sarcastically alludes to this being the pinnacle of human achievement and is a prescient reminder of inevitable demise, such that befell the great civilizations of ancient Egypt.



Fig. 56 Lei, G (2013) *L-01* IKEA table, socket and stretchable baton. 60x 128cm. MOCA, Taipei, exhibition view.

Lei is preoccupied by power and suppression in many of his works. In *L- 01* (fig.56), a baton and an electrical socket are mounted on an IKEA table surface. The bland ubiquity of the table expresses a universality and casual acceptance of violent state repression. In *Z-772* (fig.57) a riot baton, menacingly and phallically protrudes from an everyday cooking or washing pot from which in turn, a syringe pokes out . Ideas on state power and violent oppression are, once more, poignantly intermingled with the mundane and suggest that violent authoritarian control is commonplace and routine if we continue to collude with it. As ever, the dramatic and theatrical lighting employed by Lei is part of the sculpture's power and further extends its ominous presence .



Fig. 57 Lei, G (2013) *Z-772*, Aluminum pots, water cannon, syringe.
MOCA, Taipei, exhibition view.

I was also interested in the numeric and alphabetic titling that Lei assigns to his artworks as these engender, for me, a further feeling of emotional distance and alienation. They manage to conjure the dispassionate categorization of engineering parts, scientific specimens or, for that matter, the depersonalisation of inmates in an internment camp.

Lei's paintings also seem relevant to my research. Although delicate, bright and pale, they paradoxically manage to feel as claustrophobic and ominous as his sculptures. His soft and subtle paintwork is in pronounced and deliberate contrast to the content; the viewer craves the lightness and freedom suggested by the rendition and therefore is doubly confounded. In addition to this, he renders a grid structure across his compositions which lends an added feeling of claustrophobic tension. It has the impersonal rigidity of computer design programming (Lei first studied digital media) and the semblance of ever-present incarceration.

In *N-31* (fig.58) a frogman is entombed within a glazed tank sucking air from an airbed placed above him. A snowy mountaintop protrudes above this, but this too is imprisoned. In another painting *A-330* (fig.59) an aeroplane waits with its door open; but this symbol of escape is also contorted and imprisoned within the ever-present grid. The painting offers the prospect of relief and release but actually there is no chance of flight or respite.

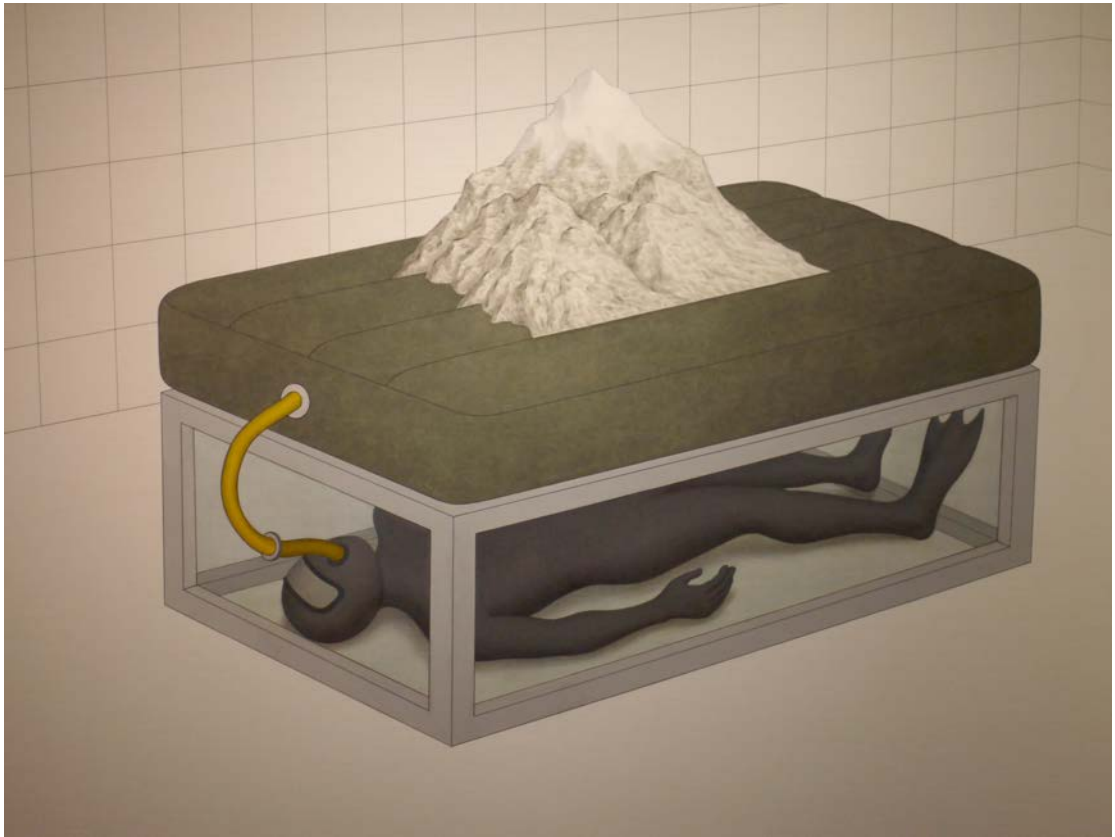


Fig.58. Lei, G (2014) *N-31*. Mixed media on canvas 180 x 240 cm. MOCA, Taipei, exhibition view.

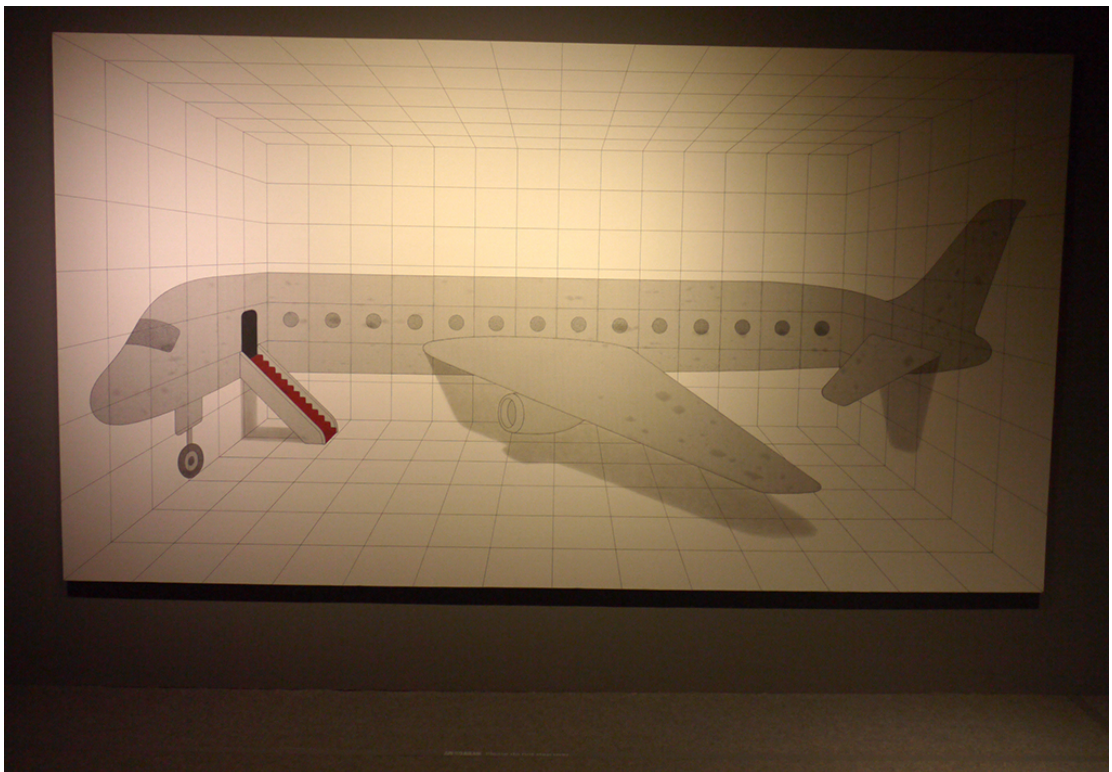


Fig.59. Lei, G (2014) *A-330*. Mixed media on canvas 195 x 360 cm.
MOCA, Taipei, exhibition view.

Tutorial feedback suggested I might consider Lynn Chadwick's work in relation to my own developing artistic practices. His sculpture manages to be at once totemic, brutalist and whimsical. Alongside contemporaries such as Kenneth Armitage, Bernard Meadows and Hubert Dalwood, Chadwick created forms that inhabit a very particular post-war British aesthetic which encapsulates the confidence of the victor but also an almost tangible evocation of post-traumatic stress alongside communal austerity. His bold metal forms a strange hinterland between figuration and abstraction. This strangeness is heightened by how Chadwick manages to imbue his manifestly cumbersome metal sculptures with a contradictory air of movement and animation. In the maquette for *Inner Eye* (fig.60) he creates a lumbering splayed carcass revealing but firmly guarding its jewel-like interior. It is a disturbing incantation of defiance in tandem with primitive violence: a reminder of the horrors of war and its precious yet vapid spoils.



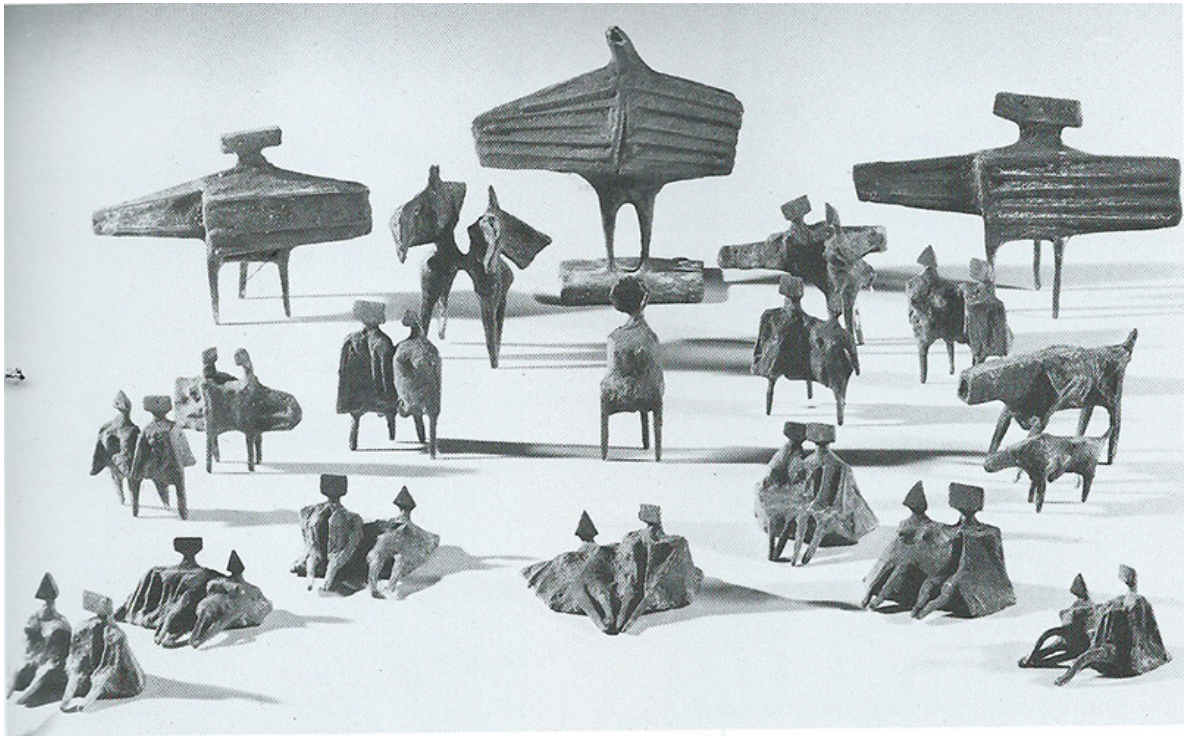
Fig.60 Chadwick, L (1952) *Inner Eye*(MaquetteIII) in *Lynn Chadwick*. Farr, D. (2004)
London: Tate Publishing p.106.

Chadwick's methodology has a refreshing directness and it is something from which I tried to learn. He uses an open and improvisational process that clearly incorporates the possibilities of the material alongside the inherent constraints:

I can straighten or bend or taper, but there are limitations, and I visualize in terms of the possibilities and limitations. I believe that it is necessary for the artist to have feeling for the method in which he works, whatever his medium. (Farr, p.9)

His sculptural forms evolved during manufacture in *an intuitive heuristic process* and this way of working led to *a steadily evolving family of forms* (Bird, p.8). Welding together materials felt for Chadwick akin to working things out through drawing. His experiments with different combinations of materials resulted in new methodologies, surfaces and then new forms.

Returning again and again to the same subjects and structures Chadwick makes subtle changes and modifications. This is shown eloquently in the photograph of small bronze figures (fig.61) where this nuanced reorientation of familiar forms and their gradual development is on display. I feel I have been trying to perform similar transmutations of my sculpture through drawing and painting.



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Fig.61 Chadwick, L (1976) Group of 20 miniature figures and Maquette III and Maquette IV in *Lynn Chadwick*. Farr, D. (2006) Aldershot: Lund Humphries p.311.



Fig.62. Chadwick, L (1977). *Pair of Walking Figures- Jubilee*. [Bronze]in
Lynn Chadwick. Bird, M(2014) Farnham: Lund Humphries. p. 151

Chadwick's later pieces became less angst ridden with the jarring fractured configurations of the *geometry of fear* (Read,1952) post-war years giving way to softer, more representational and straightforward themes. He presents us with much kinder images of couples confidently walking, conversing, or in repose, in a confident society at ease with itself. There is a sense of acute observation here, with Chadwick capturing not only subtleties of posture and gesture but also the prevailing zeitgeist. In *Pair of Walking Figures- Jubilee* (fig.62) we see two figures strolling beside each other. They are emancipated, stylish and strong, and exude a spirit of health and equilibrium. This is in stark contrast to the awkward, stilted, stretched and contorted *Strangers* (fig.63) of 1959 or the rigid monoliths of *The Watchers* (fig.64) of 1960.



Fig.63. Chadwick, L (1959). *Stranger III- Working Model*. [Bronze] in *Lynn Chadwick*.
Bird, M(2014) Farnham: Lund Humphries. p. 110



Fig. 64. Chadwick, L (1959). *The Watchers* [Steel and Stolit] in *Lynn Chadwick*.
Bird, M(2014) Farnham: Lund Humphries. p. 114

Many of the sculptors whose work I had examined so far, had been reviewed from within the confines and contexts of the art gallery space but, through reviewing Chadwick's work (fig.62, 63, 64), I was also reminded of the pertinence of the location and contextual positioning of the sculptural form. Chadwick's public and site-specific commissions are prescient reminders of how such art interplays with its environment and how potent this counter dependence can be.

I was interested in how Anselm Kiefer imbued his artworks with such powerful atmosphere at his show at the Royal Academy of Arts (2014). All of his paintings and sculptures had an almost overbearing sense of oppression and claustrophobia. The heavy impasto layering of his paintings and lugubrious palette contribute to the ominous mood and this is compounded by his series of unrelentingly sombre subject matter. I desire to engender tense and visceral atmospheres in my artworks and so I found reviewing his work was insightful and I subsequently pondered more about the materials that I could utilize in my productions.

Many of his paintings become more disorientating as they are disrupted by three-dimensional components rupturing their surface. Books, brambles, desiccated flowers create menacing schisms. In *Untitled* (fig.65) the two-dimensional becomes a dense three-dimensional scene with the addition of a thicket of brambles and layered concrete. The whole scene exudes a potent feeling of confinement, anxiety and repression.



Fig.65. Kiefer, A (2006-8) *Untitled*. Lead, concrete, roses, brambles, acrylic, oil, emulsion, ash and shellac on canvas in steel-and-glass frame. Royal Academy of Arts , December 2014.

Books are a recurrent motif employed by Kiefer. In *Black Flakes* (fig.66) a large book discordantly extrudes from the surface of a barren winter landscape. The materials used exude an idea of impenetrability or obfuscation. In *The Language of Birds* (fig.67) a double-edged metaphor gives wings to a pile of books. Literature is at first seen to metaphorically elevate their reader before we realize that the wings are made of lead and that this is a false promise. Culture liberates but also confines: it can be a key but also a lock.



Fig.66. Kiefer, A (2006) *Black Flakes*. Oil, emulsion, acrylic, charcoal, lead book, branches and plaster on canvas. Royal Academy of Arts, December 2014.



Fig.67. Kiefer, A (2013) *The Language of Birds*. Lead, metal, wood and plaster.

<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/anselm-kiefer-a-beginners-guide> (Last accessed . 15th. December 2014).

Concurrent with the Keifer show, a retrospective of Allen Jones' work was held at the Burlington Gardens' wing of the RA. The Exhibition illuminated aspects of Jones' working methodology that I found helpful, in particular, his production of simple small-scale card mock-ups in preparation for his large sculptural pieces. I felt that this straight-forward technique of taking simple sketched ideas, refining them through drawing and then trying them out by using simple folded paper, glue and tape could usefully be applied to my own process.

Despite its critical mauling, I found the exhibition engaging and thought provoking. The exaggerated female forms retained the power to make their viewer contemplate aspects of objectification and sexualization still prevalent in our society. The life-like scale of the figures and their proximity also managed to render the viewer with feelings of uncomfortable complicity and awkward voyeurism. Jones' employment of theatrical lighting added to an atmosphere of stage-show burlesque which augmented these feelings (fig.68).



Fig.68. Jones, A. *Royal Academy Exhibition*. http://ichef.bbc.co.uk/images/ic/944x531_b/p02blydd.jpg
(Last accessed 15th. December 2014).

Jones' brightly coloured bent metal sculptures of dancing couples, displayed in an adjacent gallery room (fig.69) were also of interest to me as I felt that he had managed to capture the joy and dynamic movement of dance so simply and effectively. His directness of

approach and acute capturing of evocative gestures and stances could be applied to some of my own methodologies.



Fig.69. Jones,A. *Royal Academy Exhibition*.

<https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/allen-jones-when-pop-art-meets>

(Last accessed 15th. December 2014).

During this period of study, I investigated more aspects of material culture in relation to my artistic research with particular reference to Daniel Miller. His writings, in particular *Stuff* (2010) and *The Comfort of Things* (2008) followed on from my previous analysis of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (1981). I am interested in how these theories can relate to my personal collections of objects and amalgam sculpture.

In *Stuff*, Miller examines varying aspects of our material culture arguing that objects define us as much as we define objects. The everyday objects that we wear and surround ourselves with are so familiar that they become almost invisible, yet their intrinsic power demarcates our personalities and sense of self. In *The Comfort of Things*, Miller extends these ideas further by visiting and interviewing the residents of a single, ordinary, London street in order to ascertain how disparate material objects can become integral embodiments of individual lives. Whilst acknowledging how his subjects each have very specific collections

and stories, he finds that they can reveal much more generalized truths and that *an anthropological, rather than psychological approach can be found appropriate for such an analysis*. (p.6)

In *Stuff* Miller bemoans a prevailing reductionism in much sociological research on material culture and that many studies appear inept *and clumsy compared to the nuances of the actual stuff around us* (p.154). This is a particularly difficult area as there is an inherent paradox involved:

Objects are important, not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but quite the opposite. It is often precisely because we do not see them. The less we are aware of them, the more powerfully they can determine our expectations, by setting the scene and ensuring appropriate behavior, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so. (p.50)

The very ubiquity and everydayness of material objects makes them disappear from our consciousness rendering them *blindingly obvious* (p.51) and therefore problematic. Their importance to us becomes unseen under-scrutinized and more difficult to decipher.

He also argues that, however imperceptible, objects do define us. Our ancestral belongings, homes and surroundings have a significant effect in shaping us:

Before we can make things, we are ourselves grown up and matured in the light of things that come down to us from the previous generations. We walk around the rice terraces or road systems, the housing and gardens that are effectively ancestral. These unconsciously direct our footsteps, and are landscapes of our imagination, as well as the cultural environment to which we adapt... Things, not, mind you, individual things, but the whole system of things, with their internal order, make us the people we are. (p.53)

I also find Miller's thoughts on religion and 'worldly goods' engaging. He reminds us of another paradox by which many of the world's major religions espouse the repudiation of material objects through ostentatious excess. Despite their sometimes extravagant idolatry, temples and accouterments, their dogma repeatedly celebrates the relinquishment of

materialism. There is *the fundamental contradiction whereby religions find the best way to express immateriality is through materiality.* (p.70).

Miller discusses that the accumulation of things is an essential process gradually developed throughout our lives and started, almost inadvertently, by mother to child. He reminds us of Winnicott's idea of a 'transitional' replacement of the breast with an object, such as a blanket, and that this then becomes a succession of toys and treats in an attempt to retain a sense of familial bonding. According to Miller, our amassment of material possessions throughout our lives is relatively well researched and documented, but its supersession at the end of our lives by a *process of divestment that may take place over a number of years* (p.147) , less well so. This cathartic process is in its own way highly selective with memorialization objects kept to present idealized views of our antecedents at the expense of objects which present a less savoury view:

We don't expect people to keep objects pertaining to their parent's long decline through Alzheimer's or incapacitation through illness. Instead they retain a few photos from the wedding, the holidays, the moments when the relationship came closest to its ideal.
(p.151)

In *The Comfort of Things* these ideas are seen in a tangible context when Miller conducts an anthropological survey of a London street. His intimate study of thirty individual households brings forth touching reminders of the importance of a range of objects to particular occupants and how these objects define them. *People exist for us in and through their material presence* (p.286)

Objects can become a type of *résumé* of an entire life, as can be seen in his study of an elderly woman named Dora. A red pottery piggy bank is carefully filled with coins and this is, for her, an important reminder of a childhood in poverty. Photos remind her of her mother and father even if their subject matter pertains to something tangential. Rings are reminders of two marriages, a letter of condolence from the government is a bereavement memorial, and furniture, cutlery and china ornaments are remembrances of a sojourn in Portugal, and so on.

In contrast to this, another resident's house stands out because it is almost entirely devoid

of objects. George's existence, notable because he has accrued next to nothing, reminds the reader that his life is an anomaly. The accumulation of objects is normal; he is not.

I also delved into researching the psychological underpinning of artistic practice with reference to Maria Walsh's thoughts in *Art & Psychoanalysis* (2013). Walsh examines and critiques artists who explicitly reference psychoanalytic theory as a basis for their work but:

also more uncannily, artists who profess to know nothing of their tenets or to be completely uninterested in them, have produced work whose thematics align so closely with psychoanalytic ideas that they could be said to be inseparable. One simple reason for this is that both art and psychoanalysis have a relationship to the unconscious and, while the unconscious means different things to artists and psychoanalysts, for both it is associated with mental processes that are not fully known by or under the control of the conscious mind (p.2).

She is also particularly interested in how both artists and psychoanalysts work with the term 'object'. *There are psychoanalytic objects and there are art objects, all with varying degrees of materiality* (p.2). Walsh studies a variety of conceptual viewpoints concerning the 'object' by a range of psychoanalytic theorists. She examines Winnicott and the *transitional object*, Lacan's *petit objet*, Freud and Klein's views on *internal objects* and Kristeva's *abject objects*. The themes she explores seem particularly pertinent to my own research as well as my own practice.

Walsh's examines Freud's views on the uncanny in order to help elucidate a range of artistic stimuli and motivations. Freud described the uncanny as *gloomy, dismal...ghastly*' (p.20) but also noted that in German it translates as un-homely (*-unheimlich*). It is the antithesis of what is normal, cosy, unthreatening and homely and is therefore hidden away from view. The objects that trigger this disconcerting state are objects that are anomalous and imbued with guilt and anxiety.

Female sexuality, the mother's body and her genitalia are particular precipitators of uncanny anxiety. The maternal body is at once utterly familiar as well as being a devastating anathema especially to that of a boy child who construes a castration anxiety in contemplation of his mother's genitalia. Although Walsh finds this particular idea

somewhat trite, she also considers it emblematic of a more generalized truth: that of a perceived threat to our sense of an intact self- identity, particularly in relationship to the idea of the home:

In the case of castration anxiety, the fear of losing one's position in the world is so great that it gets projected onto the female body, which is used as a guarantor of identity, a body that houses the safety of the individual, the private dwelling place safe from threat, the home. However, sticking with the Freudian story for a moment, the mother's perceived castration signifies that the safety of the home is not guaranteed and in fact may be the site of imminent danger, an idea that is extended to the house as a stand-in for the maternal body.

(p.22)



Fig. 70. Bourgeois, L(1994). *Femme Maison*. Marble.

<https://noraizagirre.wordpress.com/2011/09/19/inspiracion-louise-bourgeois/>.

(Last Accessed 9th. March 2015).

Walsh goes on to examine how a variety of artists and filmmakers use house and home motifs in this way. She notes that Louise Bourgeois returned repeatedly to the theme. In her *Femme Maison* drawings and sculptures (fig.70) she amalgamates the form of a house

with that of a prostrate female form condensing both together *much as Freud does in 'the Uncanny'* (Walsh, p.23) and in *No Exit* (fig.71) she provides us with an phallus/home combination but also a hidden entrapment. The 'male' stairwell is confined within an enveloping vaginal metal screen but it is the sculpture's hidden secret that is its psychological punctum. A hidden doorway in the staircase conceals from view two hands holding a rubber heart shaped object. This interior reality lends this sculpture a deeper resonance that *creates overlapping vectors of meaning that exceed the binary dualism of phallic and/or feminine* (,p.25).



Fig. 71. Bourgeois, L(1989). *No Exit*. Wood, painted metal and rubber.

http://arthistory.about.com/od/from_exhibitions/ig/Louise-Bourgeois/10-Louise-Bourgeois-No-Exit-1989.htm

(Last Accessed 9th. March 2015).

Walsh notes other artists that distort the house motif to enact the uncanny. Rachel Whitehead's concrete casting of a terraced house (*House*, 1993) eerily inverts interior space making homely space solid and impenetrable. Gregor Schneider arouses the uncanny by rendering his childhood suburban home in confusing reconfigurations peopled with debauched naked figures (*Dead Haus Ur*, 2001).

Dolls and mannequins also evoke the uncanny. Walsh discusses the grotesquely contorted forms photographed by Hans Bellmer and the dummy doubles of Max Ernst that have been subsequently re-invented by contemporary artists such as Charles Ray who presents us with a playful *pastiche of castration anxiety* (Walsh, p.30). She then examines Mike Kelley's curation and rationales behind his show *The Uncanny* (1993), in Arnhem, that consisted of:

a collection of images and sculptural figures and figurines which belong to the classes of humanoid objects such as wax dolls, mannequins, stuffed dolls, religious statuary and which act as doubles of the human body...The uncanny doubles acted both as a compensation for the lost narcissism of childhood, but also as a reminder of the mortality bound up with human existence (p.31).

In the chapter 'Refashioning Fetishism and Masquerade' Walsh considers the changing nature of the fetishistic. She notes how pervasive fetishistic imagery has become, particularly in pop and fashion, with a resultant gradual denudation of potency but also how the phallocentric idea of the fetishistic has been reconsidered. Established notions have been superseded by a *delinking of fetishism from a phallic economy* (p.35) to be replaced with *a position for the woman on her own terms [...] in order to find a space for female subjectivity in its realm* (p.38). This ulterior fetishism might include a realignment *to include both phallic and non-phallic (or castrative) terms simultaneously* (p.39).

Walsh discusses the 'Evolution of Abjection' (p.68) noting that *beneath the veil of the very flesh whose beauty seduces lies a reminder of our mortality and of bodily processes we would prefer to forget* (p.72). Abjection is both repulsive but also alluring and we are at once fascinated and disgusted. Abjection is *mapped onto the body of the human corpse, as well as the interior flesh of the body, and especially onto the body of the mother and her connection to blood in the rituals of birth and menstruation* (p.71) and we furtively relish this confrontation. Kiki Smith's castings of female forms which partially expose their interior anatomy (*Virgin Mary*, 1992) are cited as evocative examples of this uncomfortable duality.

Bodily fluids are:

also key to the discourse on abjection, as the separation between mother and infant is mapped onto the body's fluids as markers of control and difference. Control of urination and defecation is part of the infant's socialization. Menstruation marks the mother out as different from the infant. Bodily fluids become taboo, to be hidden from public view (p.74).

In psychoanalytic theory *these processes are symbolically significant* as they embody notions of *psychic fantasies and desires around issues of sexual difference and the relation of self and other* (p.74).

Artists such as Robert Gober, Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy all work with ideas around abjection and Walsh cites Julia Kristeva who theorizes on their motives as cathartic in 'Powers of Horror'.

In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task [...] amounts to retracting the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless "primacy" constituted by primal repression (, p.79).

Walsh finds Mike Kelley's work particularly intriguing as psychoanalytic thought pervades in his productions and writings. In the chapter 'Real-Making'- '*a Transitional Phenomenon*' we are reminded of his motives. In his tapestry *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid* (fig. 34), consisting of an amalgam of knitted dolls, Kelley *exposes the emotional ambivalence of sublimation as a cultural ideal and brings the pre-genital sexual origins of creativity into relief* (p.115).



Fig. 72. Kelley, M (1987). *More Love Hours Than Can Ever Be Repaid*. Stuffed Fabric Toys and afghans on canvas.
http://whitney.org/image_columns/0009/5716/corrected_version_800.jpg (Last Accessed 7th. April 2015).

Kelley's crowded canvas is symbolic in a number of ways. The home-made toys are the sum of painstaking graft by adults that *accrues debt* which should in turn be repaid by the child, as well as being a replication of *an idealized state of innocence and cuteness* (p.116). Kelley refers to Winnicott's theory of transitional phenomena in understanding this artwork as it designates a transitional space between parent and child. The toys and fabric become surrogate for the breast and these in turn are relegated as other cultural artifact gain more precedence. *The transitional object is ultimately relegated to what is morally perceived as dirty* (p.117). The toys are at first pristine but as they are used they become shabbier. They become tarnished by taking on, in Kelley's words, *characteristics of the child itself – it smells like the child and becomes torn and dirty like real things do. It then becomes a frightening object because it starts to represent the human in a real way and that's when it's taken from the child and thrown away* (p.117).

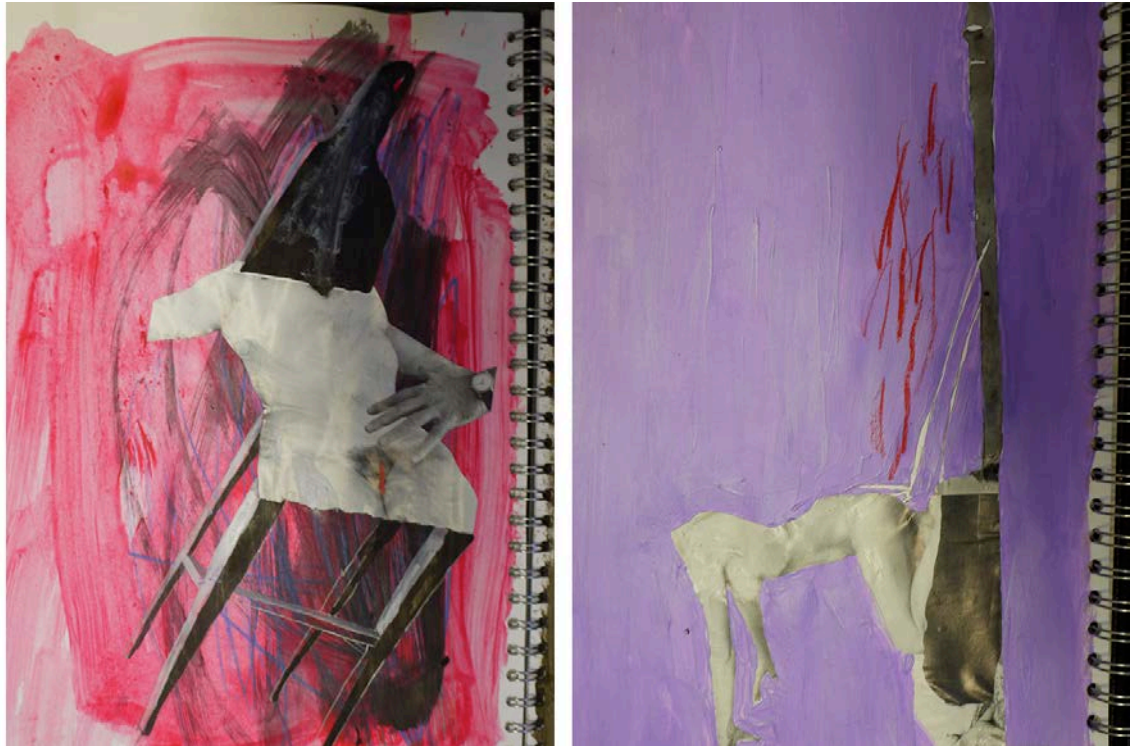


Fig. 73. Abrams, J (2014). Ink, acrylic, paper ephemera, coloured pencil. A3 Sketch Book Notebook3

These artists and theorists helped to give me a deeper understanding of my own process and stimulated new ideas and channels of enquiry. At this time, my practical work started to develop in unfamiliar directions partly based on this research.

After my previous sculptural investigations, I concluded that many of my preparatory drawings and paintings in my A3 sketchbooks more succinctly conveyed my ideas and had a vivacity and intensity that was not always translated in my constructions. The two-dimensional could take any form and was unhindered by the difficulties or limitations of things such as structural feasibility. The sketchbook also felt like an unfettered arena for self-expression and exploration. I started to make a set of explicit drawings that felt intense and visceral, in part made-up of paper ephemera that I had sourced (fig. 73) examining the basest of male impulses. The fragmentation and dislocation brought about by the clash of painting and cut paper heightened their effect.

I found that working in an A3 sketchbook (fig. 74) felt less inhibited and more honest. The book became a forum for my personal experiments with drawing and paint and a space for me to carry out investigations into how I could imbue my forms with candid exposure of my own oscillating psychological state. These drawings, in turn, helped me instigate a new mode of painting on canvas that became more candid and unselfconscious.



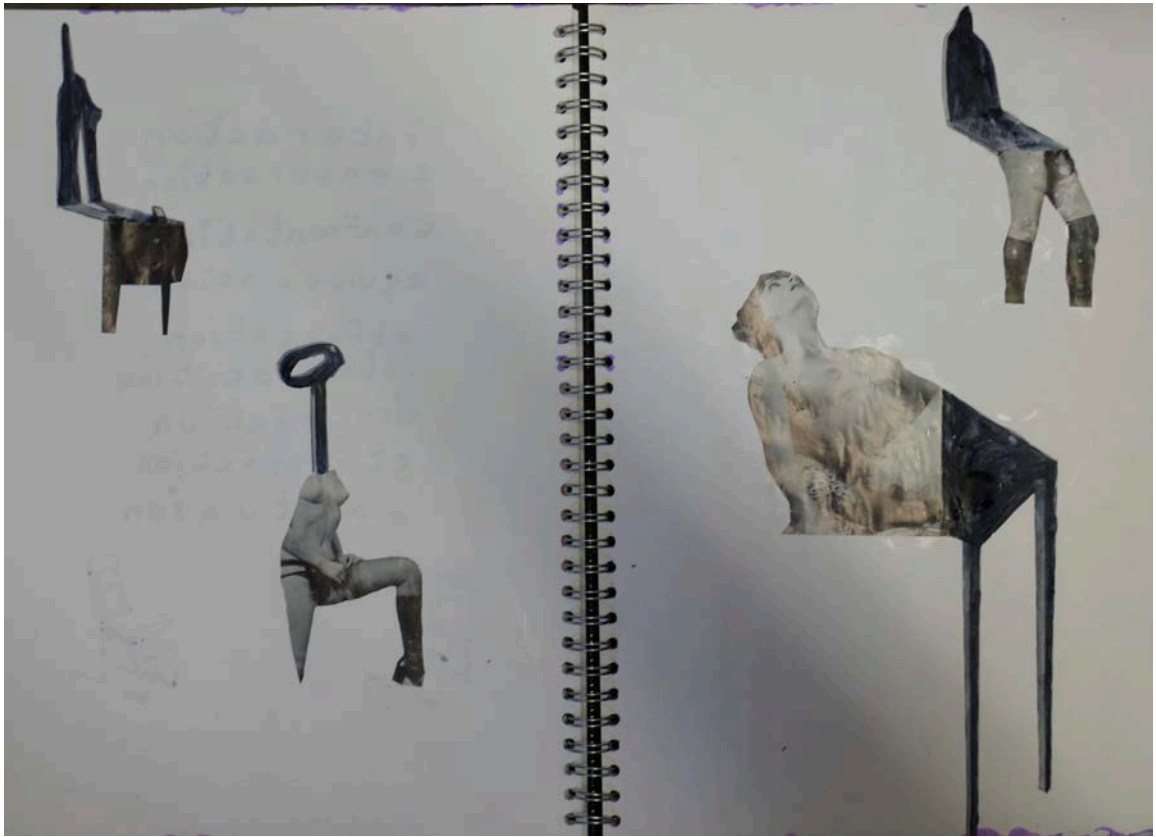


Fig. 74. Abrams, J (2014). Ink, acrylic, paper ephemera, coloured pencil. A3 Sketch Book Notebook3

I also felt that other ideas for sculptures had two-dimensional sufficiency when consigned to the pages of the sketchbook (fig. 75 & 76). At this juncture, it felt liberating that I could appreciate them as a substitutional sculptural form without the need to render them in three- dimensions.



Fig.75 *Coupled.*(2015) Sketch Book 3. Acrylic on paper.



Fig.76. Abrams, J (2014) *Animus and anima* drawings. A3 Sketch Book Notebook3

In my studio over a period of about two years (2012-2014), I had sporadically been working on a canvas entitled *Violation* (fig.77). My aim had been to capture similar subject matters on a larger scale but I felt that I had not succeeded and that the image had become lugubriously over-wrought. In this painting, the intention had been to represent virulent male sexuality. Here the livid libido of the male character dominates and violently pulls at the anthropomorphized female chair. The painting's intention was to be deliberately devoid of sentiment and aimed to represent the basest of overbearing and animalistic male sex drive. The raw colours, dense patina and scratched marks all were an attempt to elucidate this theme but, in my opinion, the painting eventually became too overworked, disordered and complex.



Fig.77. Abrams, J (2013-15) *Violation*. Oil, Acrylic, Ink, Varnish on Canvas. 87x 150 cm.

Partially in reaction to this, I set about creating new paintings where I was to employ a range of unfamiliar strategies. In *Waiting* (fig.78) I layered paint on stretched paper and then created undulating patterns to depict a seated female figure. The shapes I created were intended to show a sense of sensuality but also an emotional complexity. I found that this image retained more life than in the previous painting and I found the utilization of a much more selective palette to be less intrusive and more compelling.



Fig.78. Abrams, J (2014) *Waiting*. Acrylic on paper. 52 x 80 cm.

I then decided to work on new paintings that simplified my forms still further, in order to more closely align them with my most preliminary working drawings (fig.79). I felt that these drawings had an unequivocal immediacy and sincerity that I wanted to retain in larger pieces.

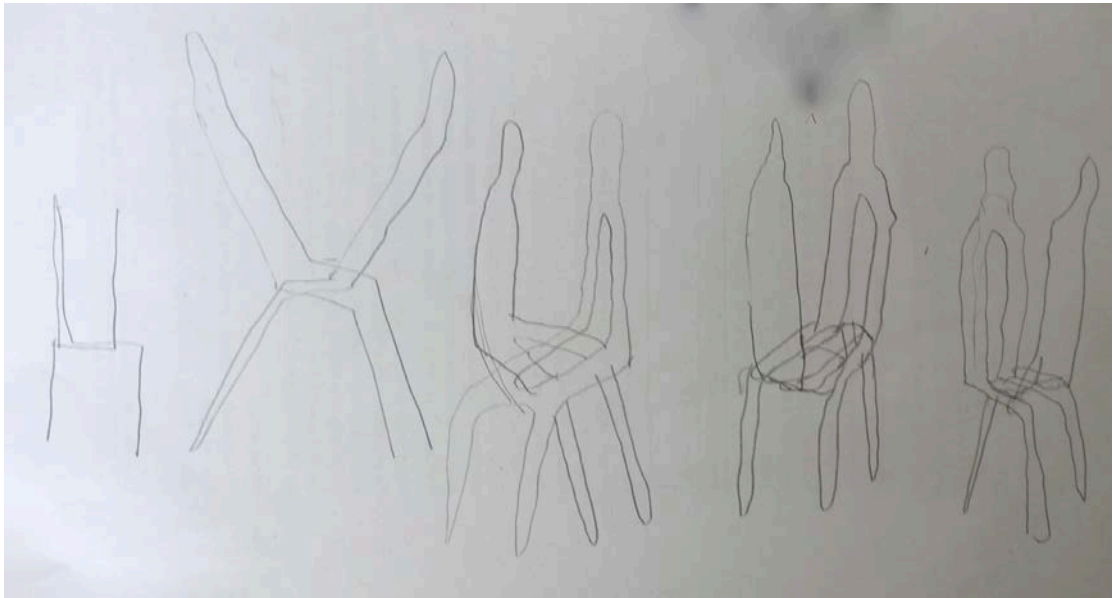


Fig.79 Abrams, J (2014) Preliminary drawings for *Stage* . Pencil on scrap paper.

I carefully prepared two stretched canvas (91cmx 91cm.) with layers of gesso. ,In simple rapid pencil line, to preserve a spontaneous line quality, I then drew upon them derivations of my preliminary drawings. To this I applied paint with equal rapidity with the purpose of retaining a vitality and fluidity to the gestural marks.

The palette I employed was deliberately cold. Combining abstraction and figuration, the paintings (fig. 49 and 80) aimed to display an emotional frigidity and anonymity as well as representing a lonely and dispassionate vision of sex and relationships. The figures perform as if on a precipitous stage. Each is dependent on each other but also inexorably entrapped.

It was salutary for me to hear different interpretations of these artworks when I presented them at my February 2015 work in progress seminar. The audience found the images interesting, and engaging but did not all find the depictions to be as detached or as dispassionate as I had intended. Some read them as passionate incantations; others felt the figures expressed shadows of each other: both genders entwined as one. These decryptions were compelling and helped inform future ideas for paintings.



Fig.80. Abrams, J (2014) *Performance*. Acrylic on Canvas 91cmx 91cm.



Fig.81. Abrams, J (2015) Doctorate Showcase Exhibition views. UEL, London.

The 2014-15 academic year culminated with the doctoral researchers exhibiting a selection of their artwork at the UEL campus. I chose to exhibit a set of my paintings (fig.81) for this event, purposefully avoiding showing any of the sculptures I had additionally made in this period. I felt these square paintings on canvas represented an important new development for my work and I wanted outside feedback and input on them. The ensuing discussion led by the gallerist Andrew Mummery and the artist Alexis Harding validated this decision, as there were very positive remarks about the effectiveness of the vast majority of the artworks.

The group commended the stark compositions and dour palette and commented on the quality of the gestural paint, the fragile pencil line and panels of primed canvas that had been deliberately left blank. They felt the paintings achieved, what some of the sculptures had failed to do: a dynamic tension and inner life and an individual artistic voice.

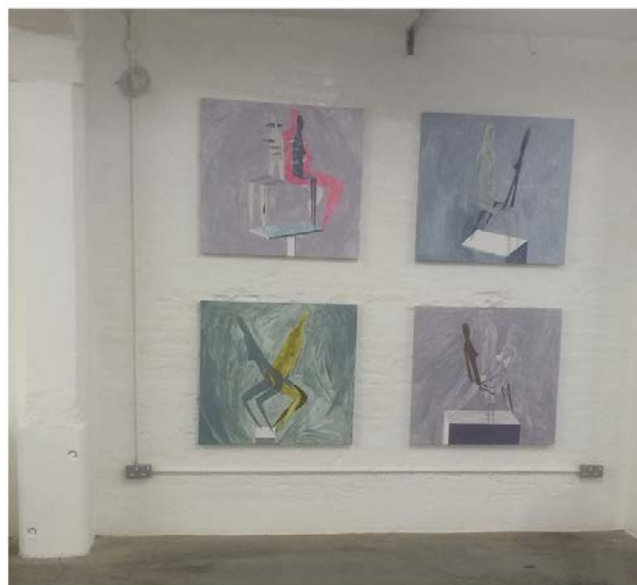
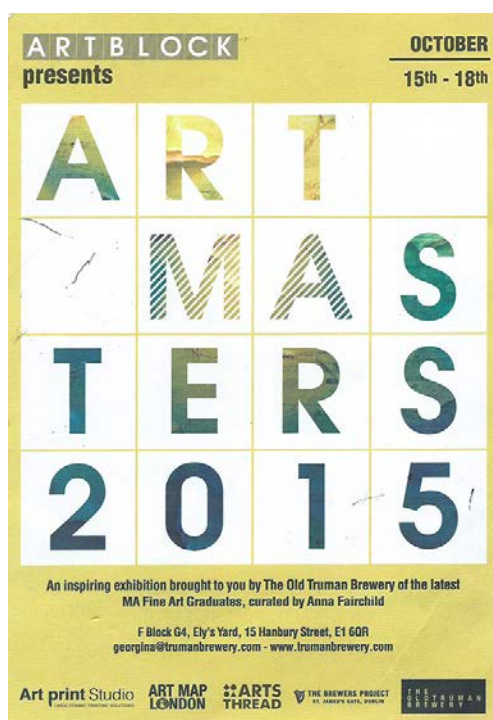


Fig.82. Abrams, J (2015) *Statements*, Paintings on Canvas, part of the *ArtMasters 2015* Exhibition, The Old Truman Brewery, London.

Participating in the group exhibition, *ArtMasters* at the Truman Brewery, London (2015), I showed four of these square paintings (fig.82). I displayed these paintings in a grid formation although each had been independently conceived and did not relate to each other apart from in theme. Each was on 91cm sq. gesso prepared stretched canvas. I re-named them, titling each with financial terms (*Consolidation*, *Statement of Account*, *Equity Release*, and *Interest Only*) as I wished to emphasise a type of dispassionate commodification of the entangled bodies in the pieces. In retrospect, I feel that paintings were too closely mounted and that I should have exhibited fewer images within the confined space available.

OBJECTS OF MASCULINITY

2015-2016



Fig .83. Abrams, J. (2015) *All Male* . Salvaged chair, balloon and gaffer tape.

I have long been interested in ideas on maleness and masculinity and it has been a constant reoccurring theme within my artistic output. With this in mind, I decided to engage more with theoretical writing on this issue particularly with reference to David Buchbinder's *Studying Men and Masculinity* (2013). This work proved an invaluable contextual resource for me on this theme. My artistic and theoretical research continued to develop in a series of concurrent directions. I simultaneously created sketches, maquettes, sculptures, drawings and paintings that referred to ideas involving gender and masculinity, but also how this could relate to material culture and expressions of personal psychology. I also studied the work of a number of artists: notably Louise Bourgeois and Annette Messager with particular reference to the psychological impetus behind their production. I have also reviewed my understandings of the work of the designer Martino Gamper not least because of his interests into the form of the chair and his investigations into materials and making. I have also been interested in the debate generated by *British Art Show 8* (2015) particularly with reference to its examination of contemporary views on materiality as well as its discussion of a redefinition of the considered parameters of artistic practice.

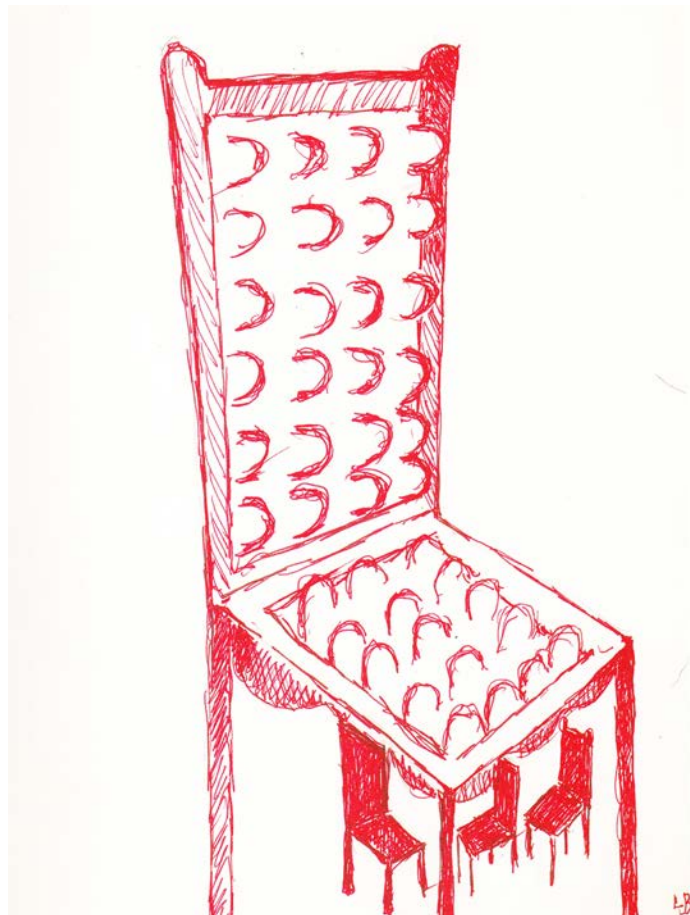


Fig.84. Bourgeois, L (1998) *Le Père Et Les Trois Fils*. Red ink and pencil on paper. In *Louise Bourgeois, Drawings and Sculpture*. Cologne: Kunsthaus Bregenz, p.117.

Louise Bourgeois work has multifarious manifestations that each delve into personal autobiography and psychology. It is intensely frank and personal laying bare intimate aspects of her history, sexuality, personality and neurosis. This candour of expression has particular personal relevance as my own artistic research has become much more autobiographical, exposing intimate aspects of my own personal psychology.

Bourgeois' art is an attempt by her to understand her own elusive emotional states by plotting them as logical coordinates. This strategy enables emotional survival through self-knowledge. (Lyon-Wall, 2002 p.10)

Her drawings became confessional outpourings, imbued with candour, and used as a personal catharsis.

For me, drawing is a form of diary. I could not help but make them as a means to exorcise or deconstruct daily fears; they (the themes) are recurrent, précis, accurate, self-incriminating and immediately regretted. Still you let them be, because the truth is better than nothing (Bernadac, 1996 p.13)

Bourgeois is an archivist of the self. Drawings are like the diaries she has written since she was a child. Drawings are the equivalent of the photographs her father took of her. Drawings are visual documents attesting to, and expressing the existence of her emotions. (Lyon-Wall, p.15)

The drawings (fig.84 & 85) show simple and brutal chair forms that Bourgeois has anthropomorphised. Their shapes dominate the diminutive characters that seem to cower below them. The subject matter feels raw and intimate with their brutal shapes and intensity of the red lines highlighting real emotions behind their rendition. The father figure of *Le Père Et Les Trois Fils* (fig.83) seems to oppress its 'sons' much as Bourgeois felt dominated by her father. The artwork implies that the 'son' chairs will in turn grow up to continue a cycle of harsh patriarchal subjugation.

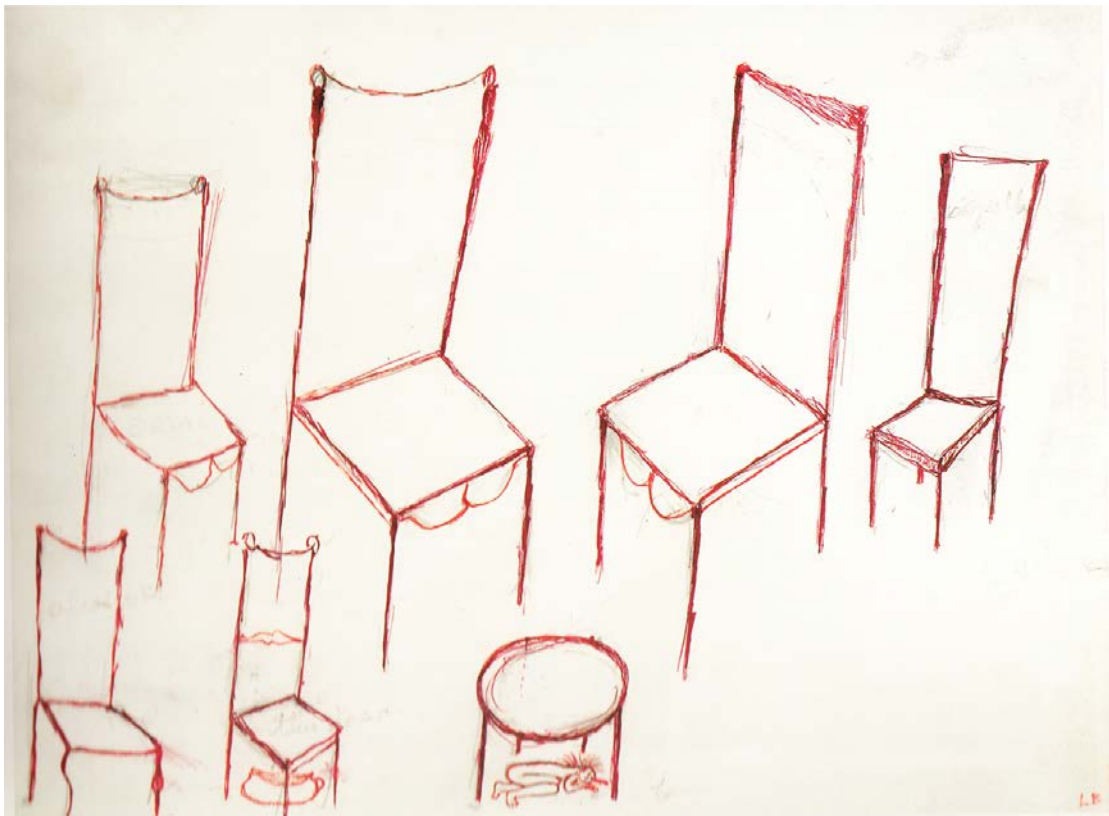


Fig.85. Bourgeois, L (1997) *Untitled*. In *Louise Bourgeois, Drawings and Sculpture*.
Cologne: Kunsthau Bregenz, p.111.

Bourgeois worked in multiple mediums alternating between different modes of expression and always attempting to find the one most appropriate to communicate her ideas and emotions. She kept extensive written diaries, drew prolifically and returned to the same subjects again and again trying to find more appropriate ways of representing them. Her move to making sculpture was due to *her dissatisfaction with painting's 'level of reality'* as she was, *convinced that she could "express much deeper things in three dimensions"* (Nixon, 2005 p.83)

Bourgeois sculpture took on a range of media and forms and although she kept returning to reinterpret particular ideas and motifs, such as the spider, she consistently evolved her methodologies and rationales. She often returned to expressing ideas on male power. The sculpture of her son *Portrait of Jean- Louis* (fig. 86) ruminates on how his maleness must inexorably develop. The child-sized sculpture stands coyly demure at the same time as it thrusts phallically. The sweet figure transmogrifies into a towering tower block of patriarchal privilege and proprietorship.

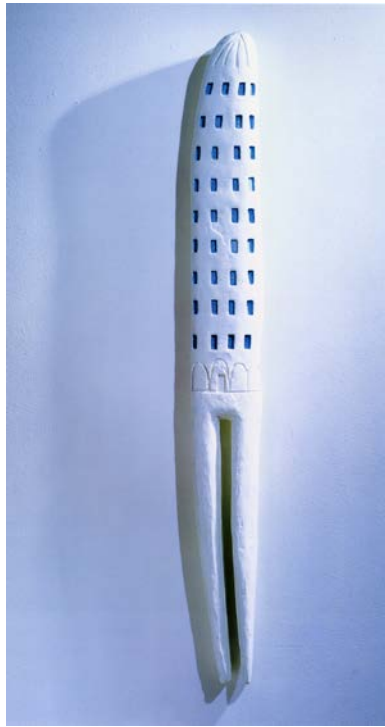


Fig.86. Bourgeois, L (1947-9) *Portrait of Jean-Louis*.

Painted Wood. Height 90cm. http://fy.rsoo.de/pdfs/louise_e.htm (Last accessed 15th. July 2015).

Her depictions of ideas on women are equally provocative. Her vast *Maman* spiders, complete with wire-mesh egg sacks, are disturbing and uncanny evocations of the maternal. Her hanging *Janus Fleuri* (fig.87) sculpture forms a vaginal area from conjoined phalluses, crudely pushed together. The moulding is deliberately course and evokes ideas on disembowelment and castration.



Fig.87. Bourgeois, L (1968) *Janus Fleuri*. Bronze, gold patina.

<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/galleryguide/285397/307619/artist/124806/artwork/1012881#>

(Last accessed 15th. July 2015).

The various incarnations of her *Femme Couteau* (fig.88) sculpture, *encapsulates female and male mutilation anxiety* (Nixon, p. 233). The sculpture is shaped at once like a vaginal slit, a knife and a decapitated pregnant torso. Woman is symbolically butchered down, confined to becoming a meat slab of perpetual fertility and violence.



Fig.88. Bourgeois, L (1982) *Femme Couteau*. Pink Marble.

http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/lowery/louise-bourgeois6-15-10_detail.asp?picnum=29

(Last accessed 15th. July 2015).

Bourgeois' exploration of her own psychology through her artistic practice is uncompromising and delved into every part of her complex neurosis. She considered her art as a form of catharsis that helped cleanse her of some of her demons. She was knowledgeable about psychoanalytical theory partly based on her various periods in therapy, and *her art would inform her psychoanalysis, just as her psychoanalysis would transform her art* (Larratt-Smith, 2012 p.10)

She was also sceptical about psychoanalysis and wryly parodied aspects of it in her work:

Her attitude toward psychoanalysis is ambivalent, wavering between wariness and parody: wariness because she thinks that psychoanalysis is incapable of healing the ills of artists, and parody because her ever-ironic art, despite its tragic dimensions, incarnates (or mimes) the theory of the Oedipus complex to such an extent that it might be wondered whether despite herself, her work represents a precocious 'anti-Oedipal' transgression of Freudian 'phallogocentrism'.

(Bernadac, 1996 p.10)

Bourgeois' life size *Personages*, fabricated between 1945 and 1955, stand as evocations of people with whom she had come into contact. They are powerful totems of memory which have individual personalities and form potent interrelationships. Although abstract they also manage to exude human character just as I wish to do in my cut-metal sculptures and paintings. In *Listening One* (fig.89), the sculptural forms are imbued with animation and relate to each other as two standing human forms. Bourgeois managed to create interplay between the two 'figures' and gave them distinct personas whilst also going deeper to allude to complex psychologies.



Fig.89. Bourgeois, L (1947) *Listening One*. In *Louise Bourgeois*. Bronze, painted white.
203x 50x 30.5 cm. London: Tate Publishing, p.210.



Fig.90. Bourgeois, L (2003) *Spider Couple*. Silver nitrate patinated bronze.
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark.

Bourgeois kept moving between abstraction and figuration, metaphor and narrative and this diversity renders the work ever more intriguing but also illusive.

One of the most renowned and enduring motifs that Bourgeois consistently returned to was that of the spider (fig.90) who, according to Bernadac (1998, p.28) she equated with ideas on protection and the mother figure. The spider, traditionally synonymous with the distasteful or uncanny, becomes a nurturer and minder: its spindly legs a refuge not a fearful encroachment. This inversion lends the concept more power as the audience wrestles with the transposal. The maternal can be ugly, invasive but ultimately it has benign purpose.

The combination of steel and soft upholstery in her *Spider* of 2003 (fig.91) exemplifies this idea. The worn fabric is evocative of lived-in homeliness whilst the metal legs splay around it as if in desperate attempt at protection of familial sanctuary.

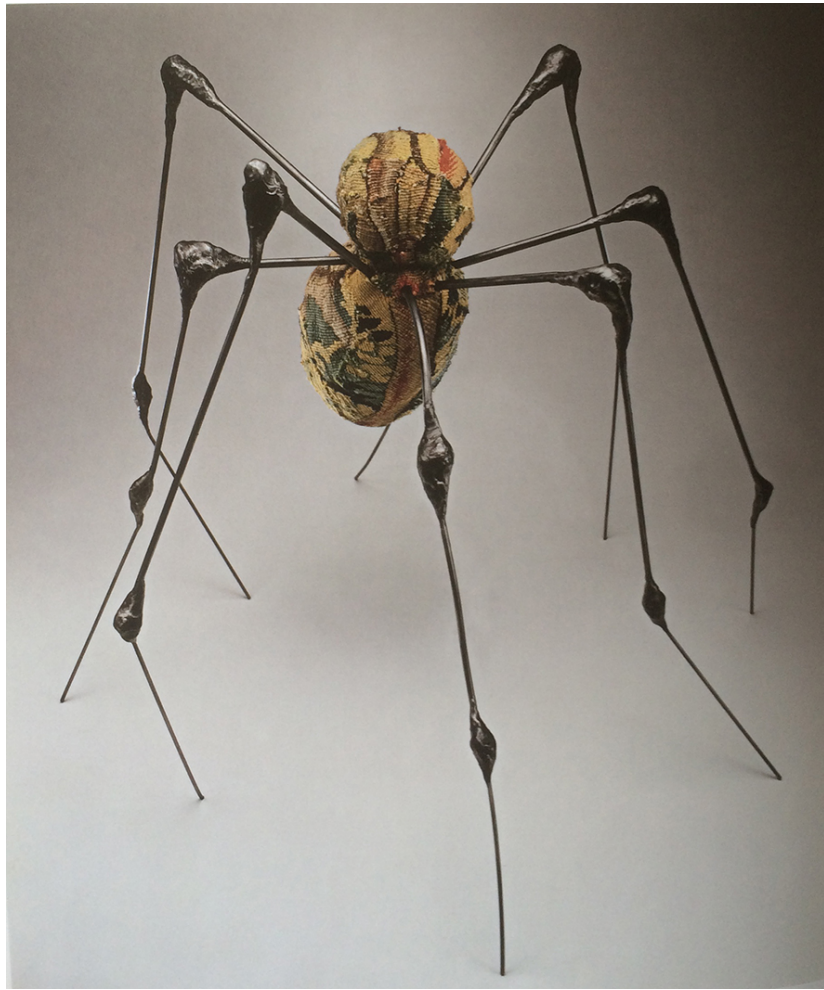


Fig.91. Bourgeois, L (2003) *Spider*. In *Louise Bourgeois*. Steel and tapestry.
45.5x 59.5x 64.7 cm. London: Tate Publishing, p.278.

After considering Bourgeois' work in relation to my own I then proceeded to look at Annette Messager:

Annette Messager's working procedure was already clearly established in her earliest ventures: appropriating things and activities that have been devalued, and investing them with supreme value; inventorying the most anodyne private practices and catapulting them into the public sphere; and translating childhood games into the adult world. (Grenier, 2000 p.49)

The fetishistic collections and amalgamations of Annette Messager have long been of interest to me and I feel they have relevance to my artistic enquiry particularly as I invest my many collections with symbolic and associative power. My interest in combining objects to create these resonances attunes well to Messager's motivation, notably my personal collection of knitted teddy bears (fig. 117).

In *The Promise of Little Effigies* (fig. 92) Messenger's toys become as intense and laden with meaning as reliquary or votive offering:

'In 'My little Effigies', I hung photos of bits of the body around the necks of ordinary looking cuddly toys on pedestals built out of words. These ridiculous little creatures thus became disturbing, just like certain voodoo dolls.' (Messenger, Grenier, p.119)



Fig.92. Messenger, A (1990) *The Promise of Little Effigies*. In *Annette Messenger: The Messengers*. Display cabinets, stuffed toys, photographs, and handwriting. 225 x 169 x 14 cm. London: Prestel, p.322.

For me the 'Little Effigies' are mortal remains, little corpses from childhood to which people remain strongly attached (p.120)

Messenger forces together apparently antithetical motifs, colliding the innocence of childhood with grainy photographic representations of adulthood; a sweet and naïve reality that reverberates against a contrasting severe vision of truth based on the photograph.

Messenger creates evocative and unsettling atmospheres in her installation environments. In *2 Clans- 2 Families* (fig.93) spliced up soft toys and bin-bags are splayed on cruciform structures, like an eerie graveyard of fetishistic, out-of-this world, yet familiar everyday life. She presents us with toys, the like of which we cherished as we grew up, brutally

dismembered and then displayed, splayed and carcass-like. Plastic bags are engorged with hidden contents, be they waste or worldly possessions, and black and white photographs of wild gurning faces punctuate the scene. They are preposterously alive but stuck in static filmic embalmmnt. She creates an environment that is grim and nasty but also curiously alive and everyday.



Fig.93. Messenger, A (1998) *2 Clans-2 Families*. Wood, plastic bags, black and white photographs, stuffed toys, clay. In *Annette Messenger: The Messengers*. Installation. London: Prestel, p.400.

One of the most original aspects of Annette Messenger's work is its amalgamation of realism and the fantastic. Far from conforming to categories that set up oppositions between them, her conception is that one is simply the dark side of the other...a dynamic polarity that runs through her whole oeuvre. (p.167)

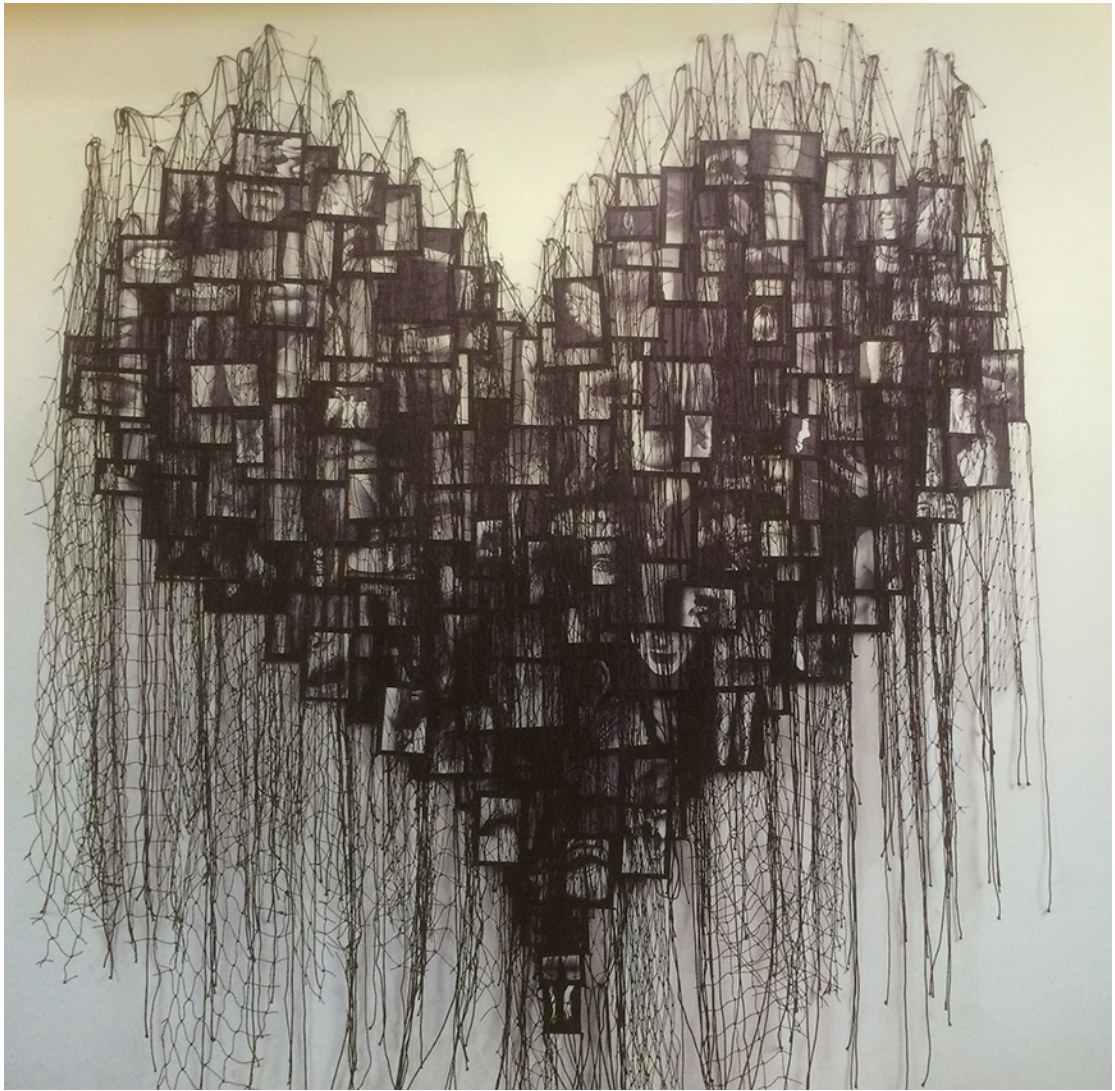


Fig.94. Messenger, A (1997-9) *My Vows under Netting*. Photographs, netting, string.
In *Annette Messenger*. Paris: Flammarion, p.167.

In *My Vows under Netting* (fig.94) Messenger transforms a simple motif and imbues it with complex layers of meaning. The heart transmogrifies into a succession of connotative notions. It becomes a mons pubis but this in turn is made up of fractioned memories (photographs) entangled and entrapped: sex, romance, remembrance and confusion in an inescapable netted snare.

Messenger returns frequently to ideas based on the fetishistic. Her amalgamated sculptures project sexual personas onto mundane objects displacing their original meanings. Traditionally fetishism, espoused by Freud, was ascribed to ideas around the male gender but here Messenger forges a very personal female territory. As Élisabeth Lebovici describes in her essay *'The Collector'*:

Annette Messenger's artworks separate bedroom works from studio works, the better to incorporate both in her aesthetic identity, thus relating at one and the same time to the realm of objects and the realm of sexuality. (Dupliax, 2007 p.119)

The fetishism that Messenger is involved with:

Put[s] women in the subject position as opposed to the object position is probably the primary concern of women artists... There is indeed a movement - at least between two genders and genres - from "public women" to "private (demure) woman", from bedroom to studio, from book to picture rail, and from something printed to something exhibited. (Dupliax, p.120)

These dark and complex interrogations of gender have relevance to my artistic research as I am exploring notions pertaining to masculinity within my study. Messenger's transposes her ideas into disturbingly potent incarnations. This is something I am interested in doing in my own creative practise.

Whilst conducting this research I visited the Ydessa Hendeles exhibition *From Her Wooden Sleep...* at the ICA in London (2015) and found that her compilations felt relevant especially on how they related to object fetishism.



Fig.95. Hendeles, Y (2015) *From Her Wooden Sleep..* Exhibition View. ICA, London.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/art-and-architecture/figures-dont-lie/article23807431/> (Last accessed 7th. May 2015).

At this exhibition, Ydessa Hendeles presented her collections of 150 wooden mannequins in carefully orchestrated and theatrical settings. Hendeles employed dramatic directional lighting to create an uncanny and unnerving atmosphere. This was further intensified by a repetitious soundtrack produced by a 1912 piano roll recording (Debussy playing his own composition 'Golliwog Cakewalk'). At one end of the gallery, dolls of differing scales were placed as if in a waiting room or in a church congregation (fig.95). The dense wood colour predominated and helped render the room still more claustrophobic. Fairground mirrors on the walls duplicated and distorted the exhibition contents, magnifying the oppressive atmosphere still further. Visitors caught their own contorted reflections in these mirrors and became unnervingly incorporated as part of the installation.

Hendeles' careful positioning of her collection *unites them in their own community, and subtly casts the viewer as an outsider, interloper or voyeur* (Hendeles, 2015 p.46). They are placed on the same *level as the viewer rather than on pedestals, plinths and platforms or behind glass* in order that they *share the viewer's physical and psychic space* (p.46):

My artistic practice has always been about assembling objects into compositions and narratives. My effort is that of a storyteller exploring culture through art and artefacts juxtaposed in a particular time and place. My overriding goal is to offer viewers a contemporary-art experience that interprets the present from the perspective of the past... (p.48).

Hendeles' assiduous mise-en-scene also brought forth aspects of her own personal history and of a disjointed upbringing in different continents. It also explored *themes of diversity and difference* with the mannequins becoming *surrogates* to make the viewer think more on how *we perceive the world around us and how perceptions of things such as race may shift over time* (p.48).

Later in my study, I revisited Hendeles work in her display at the New Museum in New York (August 2016) that comprised an obsessive and vast historic collection of photographs of teddybears and their owners (fig.96). Here again Hendeles managed to create an intense atmosphere, and through an almost excessive repetition of a single motif managed to adeptly communicate her points: anthropomorphised objects can hold real importance to people, ownership crosses all ages and genders, these ideas are constant and are rooted in

history. Her singular theme, constantly reiterated, held real power and is something I am interested in exploring through displaying large quantities of my research together.



Fig.96. Hendeles, Y (2016) the Keeper. New Museum. New York, USA.

<http://www.designboom.com/art/new-museum-the-keeper-ydessa-hendeles-exhibition-08-09-2016/>
last accessed 5th September 2016)



Fig.97. Gamper, M (2014) *100 chairs in 100 days*. <http://inhalemag.com/designer-martino-gamper-serpentine-gallery/> (Last accessed 18th. March 2016).

Martino Gamper's work feels particularly resonant and relevant to my own artistic practice and study due not only to his interest in chairs, but also because he makes work that straddles terminologies of creative making between art, design and craft, where traditionally there have been definitional rifts. Gamper's *100 Chairs, in 100 hundred days in 100 ways* (fig.97) explored the nature of chairs with thoughtfulness and insight. He collected salvaged chairs abandoned in the street around London and then developed hybrids that celebrate the materials from which they were manufactured. These amalgamations of salvaged chair forms are intended to be insightful contemplations on materials and working techniques but they also exude strong notions of narrative and deeper meaning. Gamper explains his creative rationale in deceptively straightforward ways:

The motivation was the methodology: the process of making, of producing and absolutely not striving for the perfect one. (Gamper, 2007. p.73).

Gamper talks of his process in similarly concise terms. When asked by Françoise Quintin in *British Art Show 8* to condense his working process into a few words Gamper encapsulated his into *Three-dimensional sketching, hoarding, improvising, spontaneity, gingery* (Colin, p.58).

This exploration through making is juxtaposed with an understanding and celebration of *the geographical, historical and human resonance of design: what can they tell us about their place of origin or their previous sociological context and even their previous owners? For me, the stories behind the chairs are as important as their style or even their function* (Gamper, p. 74).

Although Gamper has always, determinably, positioned himself within the realms of design debate, for me it is interesting that he was one of the chosen practitioners to be featured in *British Art Show 8*: a publication and exhibition that attempts to encapsulate the zeitgeist of contemporary artistic practice. The careful interactions of materials, craftsmanship and processes involved in the production of his chairs, is far from being concerned with the requirements of what is typically considered as design. They are not designed to be functional, anthropometric or mass-produced, their purpose is to dwell on playful combinations of component parts whose clever interplays provoke deeper contemplation. He regales us with strident combinations such as placing wood against plastic and plastic against metal (fig.98).

Gamper has always seemed more interested in the afterlife of an object than in objects themselves. How is a design actually used and how does its user relate to it? I'm more interested in the parts of design that are perhaps to do with our everyday-ness.'
(Stratford, 2014)



Fig.98. Gamper, M. (2007) *Barbapapa in Vienna*. <http://martinogamper.com/project/a-100-chairs-in-a-100-days/> (Last accessed 21 January 2016).

Gamper's creations have been exhibited in galleries worldwide and when viewed as together, it is clear that the individual pieces have an inter-relational power too. This is also of interest to me as I have long been considering how my own sculptural chairs can be exhibited and can interrelate with each other. Where Gamper positions his chairs in his installations is as pertinent as the individual pieces standing alone. Viewed together (fig.99), they appear to have conversations: they dance, converse and cavort. Their shapes

undulate across the expanse of their exhibition space, redolent of human interplay and conversation



Fig. 99. Gamper, M (2007) *View of a Hundred Chairs*

<http://www.designboom.com/design/martino-gamper-100-chairs-in-100-days/> .

(Last accessed 19th. June 2014).

Although *a major challenge to curate an exhibition that is broadly representative of current British Art* British Art Show 8 attempts to *be conceptually coherent* and provocative. Significantly, for my study, this review centres *on new thinking on materiality (and) how artists engage with the material world* in whatever medium. It also extends the debate bringing in *other practitioners other than visual artists, namely designers* (Colin, 2015 p7). This broadening of artistic discourse mirrors movements in other influential artistic forums, notably that of the Turner Prize 2015 that was awarded to *Assemble*, a collective of architect/designers, that challenged concepts on materiality, ownership and living space. It also is relevant to my own evolving practise which has moved from a preoccupation with design through my professional illustration practise, through to research into the art realm. In previous years of this study, I had steered clear of referencing Martino Gamper because of his resolutions to position himself solely within a design debate. His work, as one of the selections of British Art Show 8 helped me reconsider this stance and also helped me feel more confident about my own shifting artistic territory.

In British Art Show 8, Gamper set up a mending workshop to renew and repair objects brought along to the gallery, in order for them not to be jettisoned as refuse. The commission was *driven by Gamper's interest in how an object can be transformed or reused and by interactions with the public. This design process involve[d] the expertise of local craftspeople, who [met] and engage[d] with visitors by providing a service in a public place, hosting workshops to learn new skills and sharing.* (Gamper, 2016) The object's relationship to its owner and its revaluation by reconditioning lends it a particular potency and this bond is at the heart of what Gamper is doing: the object through its nurture has its status solidified and is rendered still more consequential.



Fig. 100 Åbäke, (2015). Installation view: *British Art Show 8*, Leeds Art Gallery, 2015-17.

Fatima, 2015. Photo © Jonte Wilde Photography 2015. <http://britishartshow8.com/artists/abake-na-1543>

(last accessed 21 January 2016)

The votive effigies displayed by Åbäke (fig.100), a London based collective of multidisciplinary graphic designers, also blur the boundaries of classification within *British Art Show 8*. Their contention is that *art, teaching or research, are not so different. It is an interesting point to consider disciplines as building sites, which can be developed in parallel.* (*British Art Show 8*, 2015). The group invites their audience to participate in the narratives of their pieces and to *disembody and repair* (Colin, p10).



Fig.101. Kane, A (2015) *But*. Installation view British Art Show 8, Leeds.

<http://britishartshow8.com/artists/alan-kane-1526> (last accessed 21 January 2016)

As part of the *British Art Show 8* exhibition, Alan Kane presented a series of functional objects including chairs made from gravestones (fig.101) and welcome mats *emphatically inviting the viewer to become a participant in the work* (Colin, p8). The chairs are devised as simple and direct reminders of our temporality. The mats serve as invocations to cross the threshold into the sometimes daunting and perplexing world of art.

British Art Show 8 was conceived as *a lens through which to re-evaluate objects, things and materials, and view them in terms of their transformative potential* (p8). Whilst we are in the midst of an era in which digital technologies are the most ubiquitous tools in the studio, Lydia Lee notes that *there is (also) a strong desire on the part of many artists to work with their hands, often in a way that emphasises the materiality of their chosen medium* (p14). The artefacts on display remind us that:

Freud and Kant both highlighted how objects and images may become bearers of special significance, in excess of their rational or use value. In our neoliberal culture, where things are measured in economic terms, it's notable that artists continue to test and foreground how art can be meaningful beyond these parameters (Crouch, 2015).

After considering *British Art Show 8*, I proceeded to look more at theory on aspects of material culture by looking at the writings of Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe and their exploration into *Second Hand Cultures* (Gregson, 2003). Their research proved a valuable extension to my understandings in this area. In this work, they examine a range of practices from considering forms and places of selling environments through to notions on redefining rubbish. They also consider types of commodity recovery and how objects can be redefined through gifting and collecting.

The relationship between rubbish and value is unclear, complex, convoluted; transfers and shifts occur between and across these cultural categories which are themselves fuzzy and striated: at one end is rubbish, at the other is high (commercial and aesthetic) value, but in-between are a range of possible object: value relations, gradations which include junk, debris, trash and kitsch on the one hand, and heirloom, antique and treasure on the other. (p.115)

Gregson and Crewe examine *how* (through second-hand artefacts) *such socially and culturally malleable concepts come to be imparted onto particular commodities at particular times* (p.115).

Considering how and why products enter a second-hand arena they ponder *the temporalities of possession and disposal* (p.117) and examine the trajectories and particularities of the journey of different objects. *Some commodities are treasured, loved, never to be discarded. Others, mistakes for example, or unwanted gifts, have a very short temporality and are quickly put back into circulation* (p.117).

According to Gregson and Crewe there are three key *disposal dispositions* that take place in regard to the second-hand: *philanthropy, economic/political critique and money-making* (p.117/8).

Disposing of items for perceived philanthropic reasons is the first rationale that the researchers explore. *Doing good through disposal* (p.123) is often carried out through charity shops or bag collection schemes. In one of their studies they recount how a *twenty-something secretary*, Sam, clears space in her home as a *space-making strategy...selecting clothing for people 'less fortunate' than herself* depositing items at *'the Cancer shop'* (p.123).

Another study finds Nicky who has 'just given a whole bagful to Romania, to the orphans' (p.124).

What we see here is the moral imperative of disposal: not only is disposal constituted as an appropriate good housekeeping practice, but part of this good housekeeping is overlain with notions of casting out appropriately, in ways that depend clearly on the identification of the deserving other (p.124).

The second rationale that Gregson and Crewe note is that of *Political and Economic Critique*. Commodities are disposed of in part *by desires toward recycling and sustainability...mobiliz[ing] narratives around global equity in order to explain* (p.124) this impulse.

Moneymaking is the third rationale. *This disposition is distinctly about exchange values. For some this is about making money from used commodities: for others it is about supplementing low incomes* (p.126). The three disposal disposition areas, *in practice, are ruptured and not mutually exclusive* (p.127). For example, Gregson and Crewe note that in one of their case-studies, an individual:

Adopts different disposal practices at different times and for different kinds of commodities. In making such judgements she draws on a number of discourses, including philanthropy, respectability, political critique and moneymaking. Her disposal strategies are thus complex, highly variable in space and time and, as such, are particularly insightful in trying to illustrate the ways in which disposal strategies are mediated...[They] invoke reasoned reflexivity and reveal a complex series of judgements about commodities, their residual and potential exchange value and their appropriateness for particular destinations (p.128).

Individuals dispose of items as a way of clearing and making space and this, Gregson notes, is invariably a gendered concern drawing on *highly traditional conventions of gender* (p.121). It is women *who undertake the sorting, sifting and bagging up of household items...in doing this [they] are both affirming their role as homemaker and reproducing assumptions about men's lack of interest in...domestic provisioning* (p.120).

Men's relationships with the second-hand are bound into conventional ideas around functionalism, selling and making money, and typically centre on objects that involve *commodities encompassing primarily electrical goods, DIY tools and materials, gardening equipment, car sundries and audio goods* (p.127).

Gregson and Crewe note that there exist *variable, embedded, frequently socially constructed circuits of commodity value*:

Commodities circulate in different regimes of value in space and time and value is defined not simply in relation to the rarity or collectability of a particular object (although evidently these are important qualities), but is intrinsically connected with the links between people and is clearly embedded in the specific possibilities provided by the fleeting place-specific conjuncture of individual consumers with particular objects (p.142).

They also note that there are also distinct *rituals of possession*. In the chapter 'Transformations: Commodity Recovery, Redefinition, Divestment and Re-enchantment' they examine how, after purchase, a commodity is invested with personal meaning and imbued with special significance and value. This value can be *ambiguous and mutable* [and is] *open to cultural reinterpretation through shifts in taste and desire and through transformations in form or function through possession rituals. Such rituals are particularly significant in the case of second-hand commodities as people are often not buying the commodity we see but a particular attribute of it which will only be realised when they return home and either renovate, reminisce, clean, repair or transform it.* (p.143).

Gregson and Crewe concentrate on three particular rituals: those of *recovery, divestment and transformation*. These theories seem particularly relevant to my object assemblage sculptures:

As commodities leave one consumption cycle and enter another, possession rituals enable the transference and/or destruction and re-creation of meaning from one commodity-world to another, thereby transforming an anonymous commodity into a meaningful possession, making a decommodified object singular. (p.144).

In the recovery, we might project imagined histories and authenticity on an object, imbuing it special value based on *traces of ownership*. In divestment, any such traces are eradicated in the owner's mind in order that they feel that the item actually belongs to them and is not sullied by previous encounters (such as clothes having already been worn). In transformation, objects are altered or added to *quite literally a commodity one's own* (p.144). Possession rituals exhibit how commodity value is constantly in a state of flux, how people *actively transform the meaning of goods* and help explain how these can assist in *self-definition* (p.145).

Meaning can be created through identification with a particular historical period. *This form of object attachment hinges on questions of authenticity and cultural capital* such as *links to music and club scenes*. Another form relies on constructing an *imagined history*. This is *largely based around romantic and fanaticized visions of the lives and times of imagined others* (p.147). Gregson notes that this vision is particularly prevalent in *middle-class men* who base their 'facts' on *familial history and storytelling* or *imaginative histories* (p.152).

To divest second-hand objects of meaning is also an important process. With particular reference to clothing Gregson notes that, in their purchasing, there is a requirement to disregard and then eliminate knowledge of the contamination of a previous owner's, *personal bodily dirt and death* (p.156). An owner performs *cleansing rituals* that are *practises of erasure and reincorporation* (p.163). I am aware that I personally, go through these processes when I handle some second-hand objects, particularly those thought to have had intimate proximity to human bodies. I divested and symbolically transformed the prosthetic limb (fig.18) that I purchased on EBay of its traces of previous ownership by wiping it with antiseptic wet-wipes: *a metaphorical clean-sheet for the re-enchantment* (its *meaning*) (p.163).

Ideas around masculinity and patriarchy have been consistent themes underpinning my artistic enterprise especially in relationship to my own self-identity. David Buchbinder's book *Studying Men and Masculinity* (2013) is an insightful survey of many pertinent aspects of this subject.

Buchbinder contests that rigid hierarchical gender structures remain entrenched in society despite a semblance of equality, and that we all operate under a tacit recognition of these

hegemonic stances. He notes that gender is defined by historical and social contexts and *that masculinity and femininity are not absolute, discrete, and independent categories, but rather derive from one another their meaning and significance* (p.92). This complex multi-faceted interrelationship feeds and sustains itself based on an ingrained historical construct. This might be a comparatively recent phenomena and *may be traced back only as far as the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, ironically the period known as the Enlightenment and to the Industrial Revolution where a new structure of work appeared and had an impact on family structures* (p.5).

Gender can be seen as performative: *one does not act in a masculine or feminine manner because one is male or female; rather, one acts in such a manner in order to be seen (by oneself as well as by others) as male or female* (p.55). This makes us all have to 'pass' as male or female and the implication of this, according to Buchbinder, is significant as *gender behaviour becomes in effect a form of protective mimicry, providing camouflage for the subject as a social entity* (p.55). In addition to this the performative by nature implies an audience that also is complicit in affirming and acting out these roles...and even when we are on our own we continue this performance as if there is an unseen audience (p.56). This idea corresponded closely to my concurrent drawings and paintings which set a stage for two gendered figures to symbolically perform upon. This performance is precarious yet fixed, charged yet impotent (fig.102).

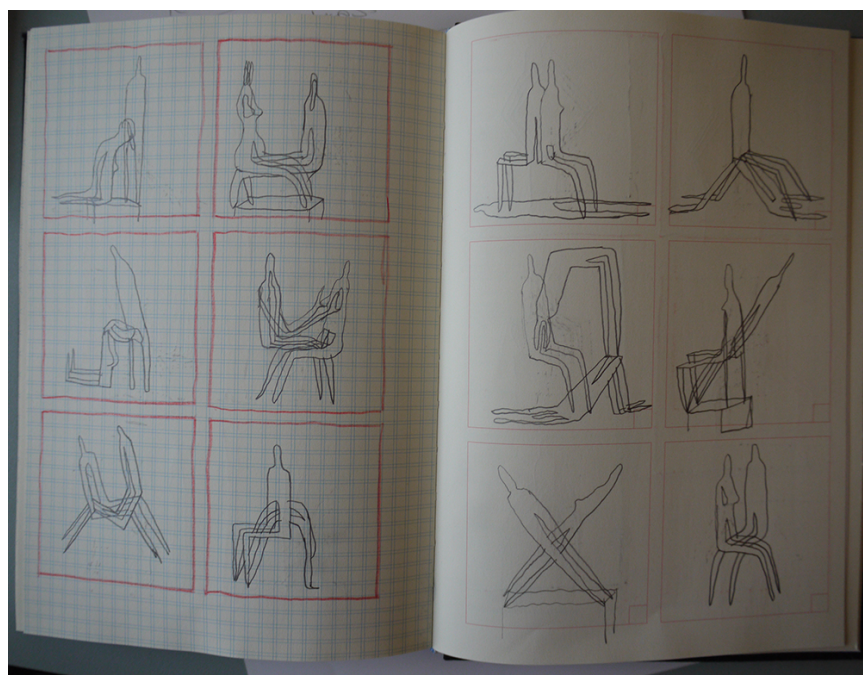


Fig.102. Abrams, J (2015) *Animus/anima* sketches. A5 ideas notebook.

An established order of male dominance governs our society and if males wish to step outside this *patriarchal order* (Buchbinder, p.69) they would be judged by society in an extreme manner. However courageous, any such repudiation would be seen as a negation *in some degree of their own manhood and hence, masculinity* (p.74).

Notions of phallic power also interest me especially in how they pertain to objects:

The possession of a penis is simply a necessary precondition to the accrual of power under a patriarchal order. Power itself is actually vested elsewhere, in a symbol called the phallus. A Greco-Roman word signifying the penis, the phallus should be thought of as the abstract representation of male power, focused and figured as a penis, because this is how, culturally, we identify the male, as against the female...[It is] engorged, not with blood (as a real, erect penis would be), but with power. By representing the sum of potential masculine power, the phallus becomes an object of desire, because (notionally anyway) the individual who attained it would wield all the power that it possesses and represents. (p.74-5)

Phallic power is prevalent in places such as the family, religious organisations, multinational companies and governments and can be represented by a succession of symbolic objects *such as large houses, cars and other vehicles, expensive clothing, or such attributes as the company of attractive, well-dressed women...*(p.75)

These symbolic signifiers and displacements of phallic power tend to form chains of equivalences, so that, in a kind of patriarchal algebra, the final term turns out always to be the phallus. For example, a wealthy man who owns an expensive and powerful car or motorbike clearly wields economic power, and hence has access to the symbolic phallus. We may render the sequence thus: powerful vehicle= wealth = power= the phallus... (p.75)

The penis, itself, is contradictory: at once vulnerable and fragile at the same time as rigid and potent. It is seen as part of the male but also, quite literally, stands alone seemingly having its own life and motivation:

The penis...may be understood as unruly, not subject to will or reason. Indeed, it appears to have a mind of its own, often producing moments of embarrassment for the male individual. It is liable, for instance, to become erect, especially in adolescence, without any necessary provocation to do so...It can also fail to achieve an erection, often at the most inopportune moment. Involuntary nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) may provide their own moments of shame or embarrassment, as can episodes of premature ejaculation.(p.131)

This apparent autonomy, coupled with its vulnerability, is confounded by projections and descriptions of the penis that evoke the decisive toughness and power of weaponry: *It is not flowers that most commonly symbolize male genitals but swords, knives, fists, guns* (p.131).

The penis is never just a fleshy organ. It is imbued with cultural and gender-political meaning, constituting it [as] an object of desire that is both sexual and part of the phallic dynamic of the patriarchal economy (p.132).

Buchbinder also ponders ideas around men's bodies, their clothing and stance. The male body exudes a complex series of cultural messages that define its relationship to masculinity. Being big with toned and defined muscles becomes synonymous with an idealised form, one that is seen as virile and successful. Traditionally such a body would be suggestive of being honed from strenuous manual labour but now it is more likely to allude to those who are wealthy enough to have an expensive gym membership and the free time to use it to full effect. I have made a succession of drawings investigating this theme (fig.103).

Big men are admired and respected...Hardness and definition...suggest a man who is certain of himself, of who he is and where he stands...His hardness suggests no vulnerability, his muscularity suggests the ability to be self-contained and self-controlled (p.140).



Fig. 103. Abrams, J (January 2015). A3 sketchbook of working drawings.

Athletic and muscled male bodies are depicted as normal and as having been achieved quite effortlessly. Depictions of men in fitness magazines never grimace in painful strife or ever raise sweat. Instead, they are already formed and quotidian.

Buchbinder notes that other archetypal forms of the male body also hold ascendancy. A more fragile, wiry '*waif*' like form is set to reflect an ideal of *extreme youthfulness* (p.124) and a burgeoning of potential, whilst a bigger, weightier figure alludes to a corpulent, self-satisfied materiality and prosperity.

Clothing also contributes to these conceptions of the male body and assists in revealing or accentuating its forms. Male clothes can be cut to broaden their wearer's shoulders and focus attention on its muscularity. Clothing also acts as a type of uniform to standardise and exemplify the experience of masculinity.

Often men in public spaces are, officially or unofficially, uniformed as soldiers, policemen, clergy or stockbrokers. The nature of the uniform is, among other things, to divert attention away from the particularities and idiosyncrasies of specific bodies and to focus on generalised public roles and statuses (p.137).

Masculine bodies should inhabit as much space as possible through their brawny bigness but also their physical posture. Strong shoulders should stand broad and legs should splay outwards (in order to accentuate the bigness of the genitals between them). This bigness is set in direct contrast to that of women who should compact themselves, for instance by keeping legs modestly together. *Men's gestures, accordingly, tend to be larger and more physical than women's [and they] are inclined to sprawl their limbs across furniture; even their voices louder and more emphatic, and so occupy space symbolically (p.137-8):*

Such a colonization of space of course signals a claim to power, not only in relation to women and their occupation of the same space, but also in relation to other men and the often unstated, but nonetheless active, negotiations of power-positionings that take place in male groups. (p.138).

Buchbinder also notes that in recent years, we have become used to being bombarded with depictions of the 'idealised' male body especially *in a naked or near-naked state:*

A parade of young men, more or less clothed, smile coquettishly, stare with indifference, scowl sullenly, or pout at us, the readers or viewers (or even ignore us altogether) from billboards, the pages of magazines and newspapers, and the screens of our televisions and cinemas. Their bodies have become not only the objects of spectacle, but, in the most common representations, spectacular objects, seemingly defining for our culture the ideal male body and, by implication, masculinity itself. (p.142).

The effect of this exposure has not been to solidify traditional concepts of masculinity but rather to expose them as shallow and without foundation. Ideas of masculinity are quite literally being laid bare. Passively a gaze is invited *that is undifferentiated*:

It might be female or male, hetero or homo. Traditional male heterosexuality, which insists that it is always active, sadistic and desiring, is now inundated with images of men's bodies as passive, masochistic and desired. Narcissism, the desire to be desired, once regarded as a feminine quality par excellence, seems in popular culture at least, now more often associated with men than with women (p.143).

Buchbinder also ponders whether notions of hegemonic masculinity can be dismantled, concluding that this would be inordinately complicated as these ideas are so bonded to every aspect of our cultural understanding. He also notes Foucault's idea *that power is productive* and that the *power of patriarchy* is not necessarily *repressive* as it *generates structures, dynamics, identities, possibilities*. (p.97)

These varied strands of research proved useful in further developing my professional practice as an artist and, during this period, my creative practice continued to evolve. I experimented with a number of formats and mediums and also made more effort to participate in public exhibitions to help test my work in wider contexts.

In a further endeavour intended to develop and extend my artistic practice along other trajectories, I sought out a collaboration with a craft practitioner through making an application to Qest Griffin (Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust; Supporting Excellence in British Craftsmanship/Griffin Gallery). They had made an open call for Fine Artists who were interested in collaborating with craftspeople. The culmination of the partnership was to be an exhibition at the Crypt Gallery for London Craft Week 2015.

I proposed a collaboration with 'a textile artist or embroiderer' as I had wanted to make 'softer' materials part of my artworks in order to diverge from the harder component forms of wood and manufactured artefacts that I had habitually used in previous sculptures. I was particularly interested in how some of these materials and processes had gender connotations inhabiting *a sphere of domestic amateurism* and was interested in how these allusions could work in the development of my own ideas especially those pertaining

to gender. *Textile arts such as spinning, quilting, embroidery, fancywork and lacemaking* (Adamson, 2007 p.150) have long been critically assessed and discussed as part of a feminist debate on craft, art and marginalised female activities and I wanted to exploit these tensions.

I was paired with a textile weaver called Margaret Jones. On visiting her at her studio/workshop I found out much about the process, its charm and also its constraints. I was also made aware of Jones' desire that the woven image be conceived from the outset and not adulterated. This was an important requirement for her as a craftswoman although I personally worried that this might stultify the development of the idea as it was being made.



Fig. 104. Abrams, J (February 2015). Four double page spreads from A3 sketchbook of working drawings.

Our collaboration engendered a healthy debate on the forms and content of my designs and also their practicalities within the perceived confines of the particular media. Through my sketched examples (fig.104), we talked through a variety of permutations. I envisaged the production of uncomplicated forms inspired by my recent paintings. We discussed whether the forms should have clear resemblance to the human form or whether simpler shapes that were more ambiguous would be more thought-provoking. I manufactured a

series of cloth and paper maquettes to work out suitable forms and we debated various alternatives with or without arms. Jones sampled various coarse weaving and edging process that we discussed before choosing a course thread and weave technique (fig.105).



Fig.105 Abrams, J. (2015) Tapestry collaboration project working maquettes. Cut paper and canvas.
Weaving samples by Margaret Jones.

We envisaged creating a large limp figure that could slump within the exhibition space: a symbol of a character intensely made but devoid of energy and life force. We also conceived an umbilically conjoined three-dimensional orb that would sit away from the figure and be an antithetical symbol of visceral vigour. The hectic tangled ball was conceived to represent a vivid wild personality and life force that has become suppressed or hidden away: a person estranged from its own personality.

In addition to this, I then extended this theme of duality further by envisaging a rigid metal figure to stand adjacent to the woven form, deliberately juxtaposing the hard metal shape with the painstakingly hand-woven. We were also fully cognisant of the imbedded ironies within the apparent stereotypical roles that much of the collaboration habited: my female collaborator painstakingly hand weaving a body-shaped form from 'natural' yarn whilst I

created a digital vector map for computerised plasma cutting of steel. I wanted the audience to involve these ideas in the artwork and reflect on how objects, materials and processes can become gendered. As the project developed, I had to come to terms with aspects of the weaving process that had not been anticipated, notably the process of stepping at the curved edges of the figure because of the nature of the bulky weaving yarn which we subsequently partially ameliorated by the addition of an edge trim.

I also had to learn how to vectorize my drawings in Adobe Illustrator so that I could develop cutting paths for a plasma metal cutter. I then had to learn how to operate the machinery and improvise a way of cutting on an outsized scale.

I felt that the final installation, its placement and all its component parts began to coalesce into a congruent form that worked well within the very particular environs of the Crypt Gallery (fig.106).





Fig.106. Abrams, J and Jones, M (2015) *Loss*.

Collaborative artwork as part of the *Make Create* Exhibition, Crypt Gallery, London.

After this exhibition, I continued to develop ideas that involved the cutting of metal, which I had initiated with my Qest Griffin collaboration. I drew out ideas for these in my sketchbooks (fig.107) and then developed a succession of three-dimensional maquettes, first with paper, then card and finally bent tin (fig.108).



Fig. 107. Abrams, J (February 2015). two double page spreads from A3 sketchbook of working drawings.



Fig. 108. Abrams, J (July, 2015) Seated figure maquettes. Cut and bent tin. 6-15cm.

These small forms (ranging from 6-15cm high) were helpful in extending my ideas and working out which forms would be structurally viable and able to support themselves upright in a succinct manner with a minimum of welding. I wanted to manufacture forms that felt at once both two and three-dimensional: characters that had a scale, personality and presence but also were flat, rigid and lacking in substance. This dichotomy, actual and metaphorical, was central to my vision. The character I developed had a split formation that raised through its torso. This split was also intended to represent a contradictory form: that of a torn sense of self but also a strident phallus.

I made drawings of my concepts, which I then translated into vector based grids to programme a digital plasma cutter. The resultant form was comprised of two double bent legs that I then welded onto a single torso form. When finished, I placed the structure in an exterior environment (fig. 109), as I was interested in how the forms would behave in different contexts, weathers and light. I was also curious to observe the gradual transformations in the artwork as it corroded. I considered that the rusting process

would enhance the sculpture's meaning engendering an addition feeling of metaphorical neglect and decay.

Whilst creating this sculpture, I also learnt how to plasma cut freehand and I became interested in experimenting with cutting additional characters in this way. These, too, I allowed to gradually rust outside (fig.110).



Fig. 109. Abrams, J (August 2015). Seated figure in exterior environment and detail.



Fig. 110. Abrams, J (August 2015). Plasma cut steel figures in exterior environment and detail.

After working on these sculptures, I then devised a wooden sculpture which transformed a salvaged chair that I had found. My *Hairchair* (fig.111) was created to express a personal view of the self. Fabricated by coarsely cutting the chair's back support and then stapling sheets of shaped hardboard to it, the sculpture was conceived to be at once rigid and austere at the same time as being vulnerable and facetious. The metal wire 'hairs' are meant to painfully pierce the body and then cavort outwards. The hairs are no longer youthful brown but now are intermingled with aging silver (emulating my own chest hairs). The body is depersonalised by having no facial features. Its form splays upwards exposing an expanding void within. This metaphorical void alludes to a personal sense of numbness, disconnection and disengagement.

On completing the artwork, I experimented with its positioning in different situations around my own home, studio and working environments as I am aware that, as an alter-ego, its context has an added resonance.



Fig. 111. Abrams, J (November 2015). *Hairchair*. Salvaged chair, wood and wire.

At the same time as making this sculpture I experimented with other more complex and fluid forms. In the maquette *Complicate* (fig.112), I developed sliding paroxysmal shapes in attempt to represent bewildering aspects of psychology. These forms were in part inspired by my visit to the Ny Carlsberg Museum, Denmark, where I had viewed the *Aerial Boundaries*(1949) by Robert Jacobsen and Jean Dewasne .



Fig. 112. Abrams, J (November 2015). *Complicate*. Maquette, salvaged hardboard 60cm.

In reaction to these complicated forms, I then reverted to the creation of a simplified expression of masculinity and the self in the sculpture *All Male* (fig.105). Here masculinity and male libido is pruned down to something silly, fleeting and vulnerable. I had found the skewed red chair in a skip and, for me, in its slightly broken form its stance appeared anthropomorphically precarious and absurd. The balloon rendered the phallus literally as pumped up and childlike. The gaffer tape was meant to allude to manful DIY. The three elements, for me, come together to succinctly debunk masculinist assertions in a stark and sardonic way.

Whilst creating these artworks, I continued to develop a series of square paintings on canvas that investigated ideas on gender, sexuality and relationships. In these artworks, figures balance precariously on 'stages' as if performing their relationships or gender roles. I

have deliberately made these performances hazardous, trying to create an unstable and vulnerable equilibrium that any a slight variance or movement could topple. I have become aware that the height, and hence danger implicit in these 'stages', is in part dependent on the height and positioning of the paintings themselves. Smaller figures placed higher on a gallery wall will have further to symbolically plummet.

Increasingly, I became more cognisant that the preparation of my canvases with layer-on-layer of white gesso served a dual purpose. The protracted process not only had the straight-forward effect of smoothing the texture of the canvas surface to create a flatter working area of chalky white but also created a ritualised period of reflection on an envisaged idea.

In one painting *Wordless* (fig.113), I developed ideas on interdependence with a male and female figure sitting ambiguously on, or over each other. The male figure is pierced by shards of, what I envisage as metal, through its head and torso. The figures sit mutely and almost daintily together, disregarding their perilous position and blatant damage.



Fig. 113. Abrams, J. (December 2015) *Wordless*. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas 140cm x 140cm.

In *Anima* (fig. 114), the male seated figure contains the female that subtly, emanates from him. The painting is meant to express my views, solidified by my readings of Buchbinder, that gender is not an exact concept and instead is a more complex duality. Here the female part of the self slips out and dissipates into its (tonal equivalent) surroundings. The rigid male form that will be left behind will be cold and bereft without its counterpart. It, again, sits precipitously balanced on the edge of its stage.



Fig. 114. Abrams, J (January 2015). *Anima*. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas 180cm x 180cm.

Whilst making these paintings, I visited the *Tightrope Walk: Painted Images After Abstraction* at the White Cube Gallery, Bermondsey (2016) (fig. 115), curated by the American critic Barry Schwabsky in order to help me understand more about the contemporary context to my work. I found the works on display to be a useful counterpoint to my own although many of the artworks on display left me unmoved. I enjoyed being reacquainted with the work of Domenico Gnoli at this exhibition and it was

absorbing to see his creations in person ;a curl of hair (*Curl*, 1969) and a collar and tie (*Cravate*,1967), as I had previously only seen them in books and digital form . I have always been interested in how he transposed the minutiae of personal detail into grandiose scales. Whilst at the exhibition, I reflected more on the shape and form of my own work and how I considered my painted works on canvas to be artistic statements and that those on paper or confined to sketchbooks still remained preparatory pieces.



Fig.115. *Tightrope Walk: Painted Images After Abstraction* (2016), installation view, North & South Galleries, White Cube Bermondsey, 25 November 2015 - 24 January 2016. Photo © White Cube (George Darrell) Available at: <http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/tightrope-walk-painted-images-after-abstraction-curated-by-barry-schwabsky-at-white-cube-bermondsey-london/>

During this period I initiated a range of evolving strategies to assist in creating my painted artworks on canvas. I set about utilising a much wider variety of sketchbook formats to experiment with ideas, compositions and designs and I used these simultaneously to establish broadening permutations on individual themes (fig. 116). One notebook had a series of pre-printed grid structures of varying formats and this proved especially useful (figs. 117, 118 & 119). This more expansive working methodology was particularly thought-provoking and productive in the development of ‘finished’ artworks, but I also began to consider these preparatory studies as artistic statements in their own right. They

possessed an unfussy and uninhibited charm and resolve, and I was also interested in how ideas-panels that had been conceived individually worked collectively when seen together. This resulted in a personal re-evaluation of both the works within the notebooks but also on how sets of images could be combined in future.



Fig. 116. Abrams, J (June 2015 onwards). Sketchbooks of different sizes (A3-A6) of preparatory 'chair' studies.



Fig. 117. Abrams, J (October 2015). A5 grid sketchbook of working drawings. October 2015.

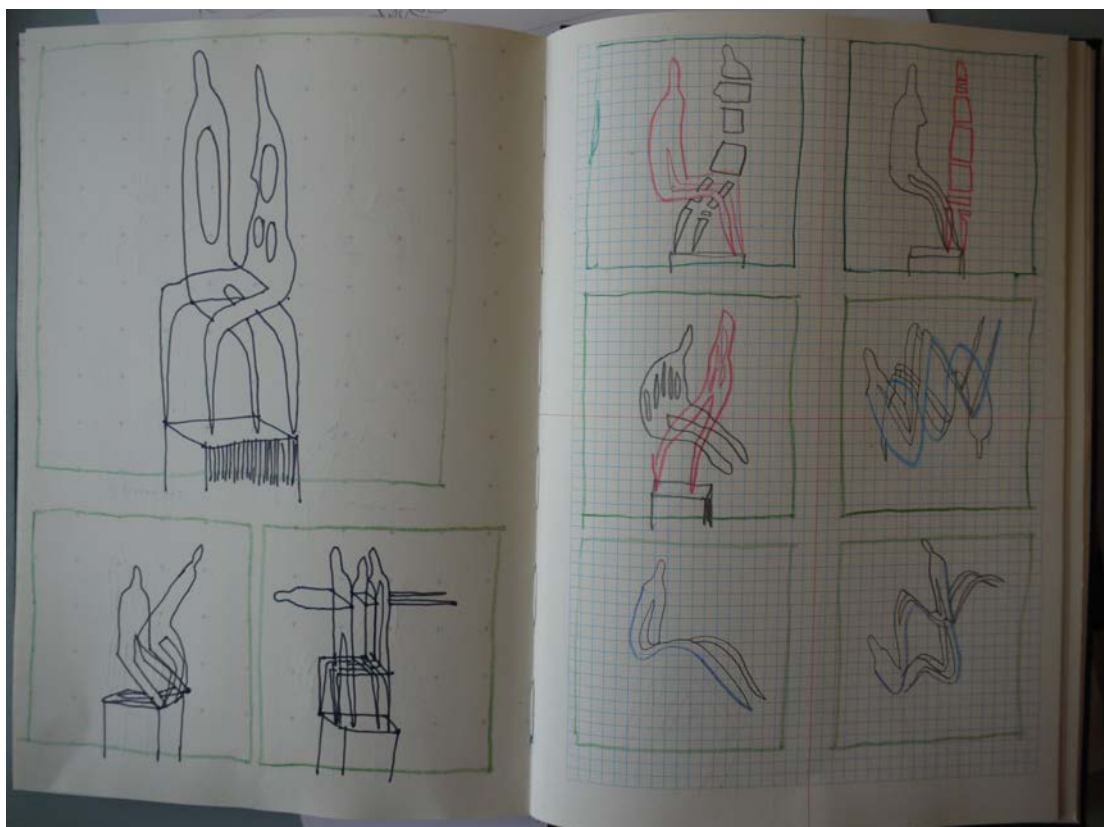


Fig. 118. Abrams, J (October 2015). A5 grid sketchbook of working drawings. October 2015.

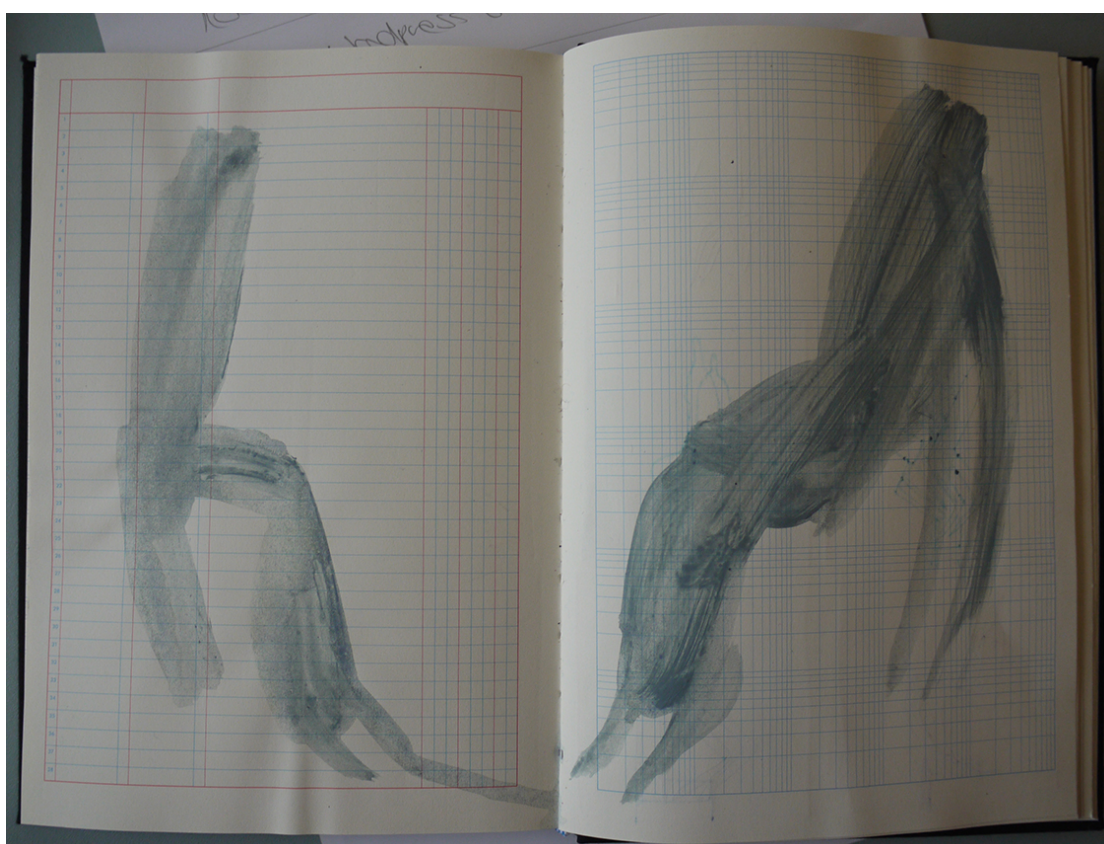


Fig. 119. Abrams, J (October 2015). A5 grid sketchbook of working drawings.

I continued to make larger drawings in my A3 sketchbooks (fig. 120 and 121); these too, felt particularly uninhibited and I enjoyed combining a range of materials and process in experimental combinations. At the *WIPS* (Work in Progress Seminar) in November 2015, I presented a succession of these studies and there was a useful debate on the viability of using these (alone or in combination) as artworks. I once again deliberated on this and began to be increasingly reconciled to finding a way of using them in this manner. This despite feeling trepidation in regard to physically breaking up my sketchbooks, due to them being a chronological dossier and insight into my thinking and process at particular junctures of my developing research. I resolved to present a selection at subsequent public exhibitions and at the UEL End of Year Show 2016.

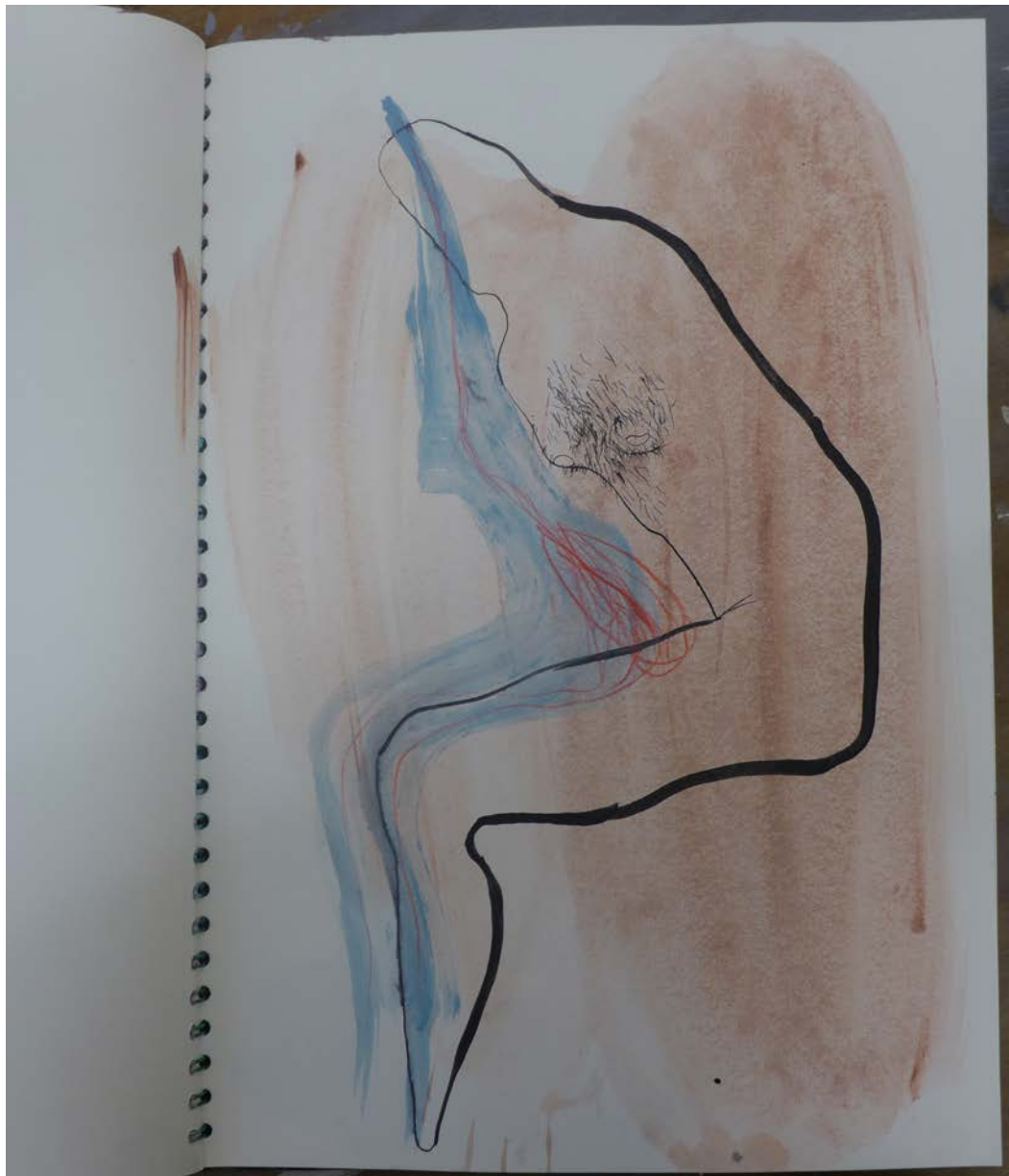


Fig. 120. Abrams, J (January 2015). A3 sketchbook of working drawings.



Fig. 121. Abrams, J (January 2015). A3 sketchbook of working drawings.

Also in the ensuing conversation, I was reminded of my desire to amalgamate ‘soft’ materials into my otherwise ‘hard’ sculptural forms. I had long contemplated using these to express a different aspect of my personality and also I wished to incorporate ideas based on my personal collection of hand-knitted teddy bears and my research into the potency of *transitional objects* with reference to Winnicott. Even as an adult, I retain a close affection

for my soft toys (fig.122) and I pondered whether I could examine this interest through making sculptural interactions. I was also reminded of Maria Walsh's exploration of Mike Kelsey's work in a chapter of her *Art & Psychoanalysis* (2013), which I subsequently revisited as part of this research. Catherine De Monchaux's highly sexualised sculptural forms using combinations of soft and hard materials were mentioned as a pertinent reference point in this meeting too.



Fig. 122. Part of personal hand-made/knitted soft toy collection. March 2015.

I subsequently sketched designs for a *Bearchair* (fig. 123) in an A3 sketchbook and assigned a close friend to start the onerous task of hand-knitting the body 'bear' section.



Fig. 123. Abrams, J (January 2015). *Bearchair* design. Sketched ideas for proposed *transitional* chair.

I exhibited the final piece (fig.124) as a solitary sculptural component surrounded by my paintings in the *Doctorate Showcase* exhibition at UEL in 2016. In response to this I received a range of useful critical feedback notably on how the bear's awkward form fitted jarringly with the delicate paintings surrounding it. Developing this interaction between apparently opposing forms is something I resolved to investigate further in future shows.



Fig. 124. Abrams, J (January 2015). *Bearchair* Salvaged chair, wool and stuffing.

When my supervisor visited my studio in January 2016, I gained valuable insight on my artistic endeavours. I showed him a series of maquettes (based on some sketches) that I had been working on (fig.125) for elongated totemic male seat sculptures. We discussed the

materials which the maquettes were fabricated from and we both felt that, made from other materials, these working models could become artworks in their own right even at a diminutive scale. My supervisor suggested conducting experiments into making the forms with lead due to this material's intrinsic qualities: notably its pliability, heaviness and its toxicity. We discussed various interpretations this material could lend a potential sculpture and how these could assist in accentuating notions of masculinity within the works, with toxicity, heaviness and malleability becoming material metaphors within the works. I subsequently fashioned a series of lead figures beginning with *Lead Man: flaccid* (fig.126). This first sculpture soon sagged due to its own weight, slumping until almost flat and I had to reduce the size of ensuing models in order for them to remain erect. The terminologies of *drooping*, *hardness*, *softness* and *erect* seemed particularly pertinent to the phallic forms I was creating and I was interested how I could utilise these words in subsequent titling of artworks.



Fig. 125. Sketches and maquettes for *Totem Seats*. Scissor cut metal plate, self-drying clay and wood block (h 25cm). September 2015.



Fig. 126. *Lead Man: flaccid*. Lead plate (h 40cm). January 2016.

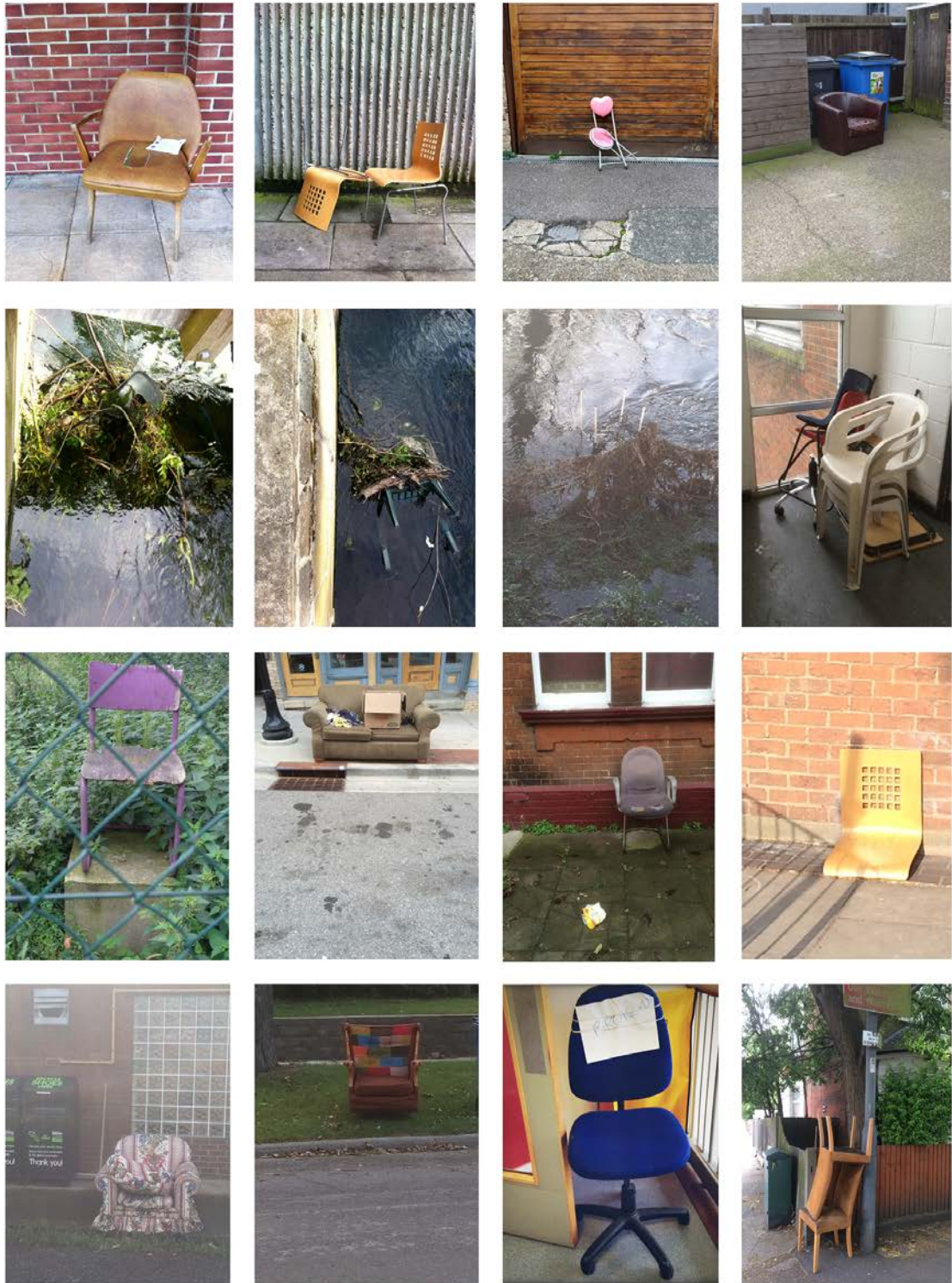


Fig. 127. Abrams, J (2014- 16). *Abandoned Chairs*. Part of a photographic series recording discarded chairs.

Concurrent with creating my other artistic practice, I developed the habit of photographing discarded chairs that I had encountered around me on my day-to-day travels (fig.127). For me, these chairs held a particular melancholic power as they have been openly discarded and rejected. I was in the habit of anthropomorphising them, making them represent imagined previous owners, earlier lives and occupations that have now become redundant

and dejected. At my work in progress seminar (March, 2016), I showed this research and there was an interesting and helpful ensuing debate. Many respondents found that they too felt that the photographs had an emotional potency and they urged me to continue this study as a viable strand of research. Later comments suggested I consider including them within subsequent exhibitions.

One respondent noted that in this set of images there was a much more extensive range of chair forms than I habitually employ in my chair artworks. The more substantially upholstered abandoned armchairs and sofas that I presented could have the potentiality for wider connotations and meanings. This observation caused me to deliberate further on my rationales for using more skeletal forms in my sculptural and painted works, concluding that this structural severity is envisaged to reflect a harsh and uncompromising vision of my own physical and psychological state. There is a metaphorical lack of bigness and substance and by removing any vestige of upholstery; comfort and compassion are symbolically eviscerated. I did, however, resolve to look at other chair forms in my future research.

As a culmination to this period of study, I devised one more sculptural artwork that, at least in part, emanated from these pieces of contextual research. In *Expectation* (fig.128), I conceived a stark pairing of a chair with a ladder, both that I had scavenged. I wanted this piece to signify an ever-present but ultimately futile aspiration for its (male) sitter. The ladder represents a phallically erect eagerness which ultimately travels nowhere. It signifies a view of masculinity in crisis with its established meanings now uncertain and even forlorn. Its status as a second hand object gives a sense of everyday universality to this condition.



Fig. 128. Abrams, J (June 2016). *Expectation*. Salvaged wooden chair and ladder.



Fig.129. Abrams, J (2016) *Doctorate Showcase* Exhibition. Part exhibition view with Knitted- chair sculpture and small(20x 20cm) sequential paintings on canvas-board.



Fig.130. Abrams, J (2016) UEL Showcase exhibition view.

For the Doctorate Showcase exhibition of 2016, I decided to show a sequential series of 13 small paintings on one side of my allocated area with my *Bearchair* (fig.129) and framed sketchbook drawings in an adjacent area (fig.130). This combination roused vastly contrasting opinions from their beholders. Some felt that the component parts diluted the potency of each other. Others found the elements held coherence and strength. I resolved to further experiment with these tense combinations and contradictions in my subsequent show.

TOWARDS AN END

2016-2017



Fig.131. Abrams, J (2016) *Ownership*. Chair construction.

Salvaged chair, salvaged keys, wood and screws.

During my final period of study at UEL, I determinedly spent time creating new artwork and experimenting with different methodologies in order to find viable ways to bring the various strands of my artistic practice together. I researched more into ideas around masculinity particularly with reference to the writing of Grayson Perry. I continued to consider a range of artists and visited exhibitions pertinent to my study.

To test whether differing aspects of my artistic output could viably coalesce within a single exhibition environment, I conceived my *Chaired by...* solo show which took place in the summer of 2016 at the Platform Gallery at Kingston (fig.132, 133 & 114). For this show, I devised a complex amalgamation of my paintings on canvas, studies on paper from my sketchbook/notebooks, my three-dimensional models and my full-size chair sculptures. I feel that this exhibition was my most ambitious to date and provides valuable insight into the staging of my professional doctoral submission.

Planning my exhibition was a protracted process, as I wanted an environment that was complex at the same time as being balanced and pared down. I wanted to place a deliberate jarring of interplaying ideas and artworks that would all vie for visitor's attention whilst at the same time retain a sense of curation and control. In addition to this, I wanted to manage another antithetical aim: I wanted each artwork to be considered both as an individual statement alongside being seen as part of an aggregated set of relational iterations on a theme. I felt that the large space of the Platform Gallery assisted in this process but also, in part, denuded it. I felt that the exhibition space, divided into two different areas by public-walkways, lost some of its coherency although it did have the beneficial effect of inviting wider audience participation.

I purposefully included aspects of my working process in this exhibition, placing a number of my sketchbooks and notebooks under glass in order to convey that the work was part of a still broader investigation, and that the permutations of chair ideas were continuing to expand (fig.126). I also wanted this vitrine to be reminiscent of a trophy cabinet or museum collection; both enticing yet immutable. I have long been captivated by collections such as that of the Pitt Rivers in Oxford and wanted my exhibition to have some reference to such an anthropological cornucopia.



Fig.132. Abrams, J (2016) *Chaired By.* Installation view,
Platform Gallery, Kingston University, London



Fig.133. Abrams, J (2016) *Chaired By.* Installation view,
Platform Gallery, Kingston University, London



Fig.134. Abrams, J (2016) *Chaired By...* Exhibition View,
Platform Gallery, Kingston University, London

As part of my installation, I took the decision to display pages taken from my sketchbooks on the gallery walls, consciously promoting their status from preparatory study to 'finished artwork'. (fig.135).

The exhibition garnered useful and very positive feedback. This affirmation has lent me confidence to bring similar complexity to the designs for my doctorate exhibition which I envisaged also bringing together varied components of this research both two and three dimensional. One criticism was that a piece of explanatory introduction text as too expansive leaving too little space for audience interpretation. Another was that the shop-purchased frames for my A3 Sketchbooks (fig.135) were superfluous and incongruent. I appreciated this input and will reflect on it for future exhibitions.



Fig.135. Abrams, J (2016) *Chaired By..*. Exhibition View, Framed A3 sketchbook pages.
Platform Gallery, Kingston University, London.

After this exhibition I entered a period of study that felt particularly dark and introverted. I produced a series of paintings that were dark both literally and metaphorically, which corresponded to a welling of personal psychological gloom, a disposition that I am sporadically afflicted with. I lugubriously set about a new A3 sketchbook that I resolved would be almost entirely rendered using black mediums (fig.136) and also started using a more sombre palette within a series of square paintings. These depressive periods habitually had resulted in severe impediments to my creative output but this time I attempted to force myself to continue making and use the act of doing so as a type of catharsis.



Fig.136. Abrams, J (2016) A3 sketchbook 5.

I resolved to follow a now established methodology of devising compositions for my square paintings on canvas by making a series of small sketched images in a gridded A5 notebook (fig.137). I could then review these at a later date to decide which, if any, I might take forward. This 'cooling off' period had become an effective way to reflect on my own artistic output and enable a more profound critical viewpoint. This process then proceeded into a

third stage where I would take my selections and render them as small-scale paintings on prepared canvas board (fig.138). Some of these might subsequently be transitioned to a fourth stage where I would consider making larger versions on stretched canvas such as in *Glass and Steel* (fig.139) and *Fog* (fig.140). As I fashioned this series of work, I was aware that I was producing work in a slower manner than usual due to my depressive state. I was also made aware that 'working through' this state did manage to create a subtle yet significant cathartic momentum that resulted in a more positive psychological state.

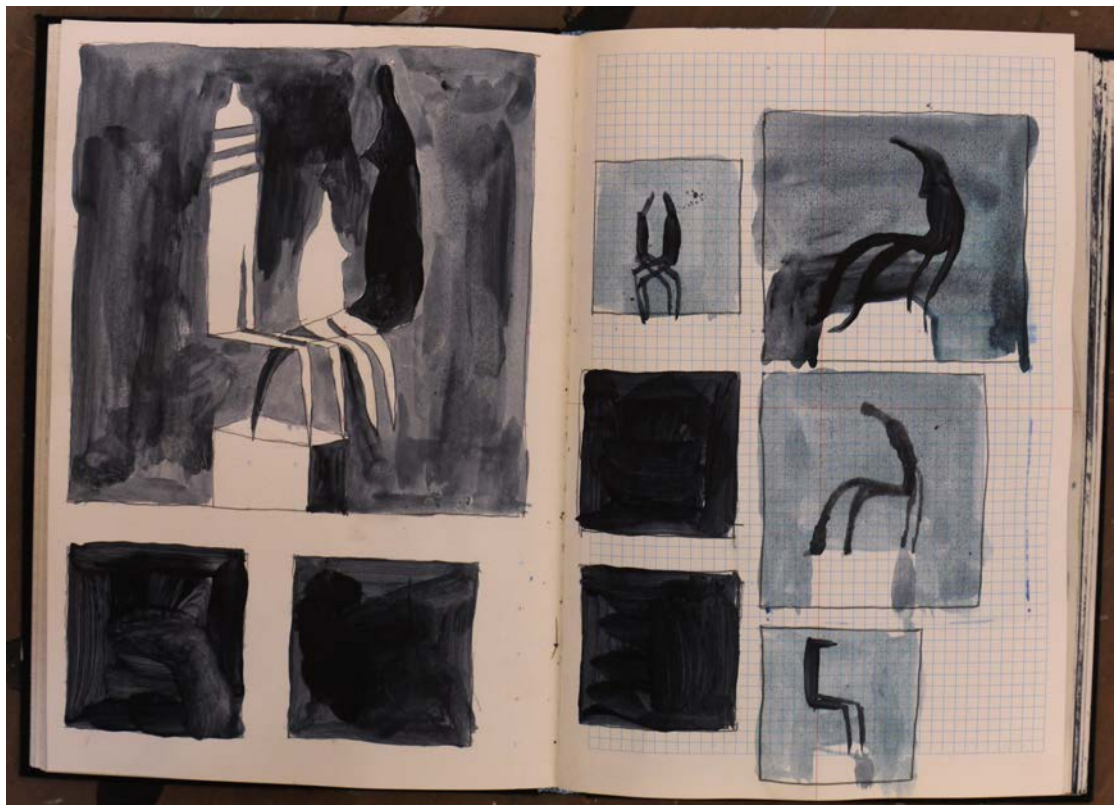


Fig.137. Abrams, J (2016) *A5 Grid Sketchbook*.



Fig.138. Abrams, J (2016) Small Square paintings. 20 x 20cm.



Fig.139. Abrams, J (2016) *Glass and Steel*. Square painting on canvas. 127 x 127cm.



Fig.140. Abrams, J (2016) *Fog*. Square painting on canvas. 95 x 95cm.

At this juncture, I set about creating more three-dimensional artworks. I decided to experiment with using a set of rulers I had accumulated in my studio to create chair formations. For me, these rulers stimulated ideas of men attempting to ‘measure-up’ to expectations of gender (fig.141). When combined, the varying scales and materials which the rulers are made from hint at how ubiquitous and all-encompassing these ideas might be. The phallic ruler-made men stand rigidly together, competing in size and strength.

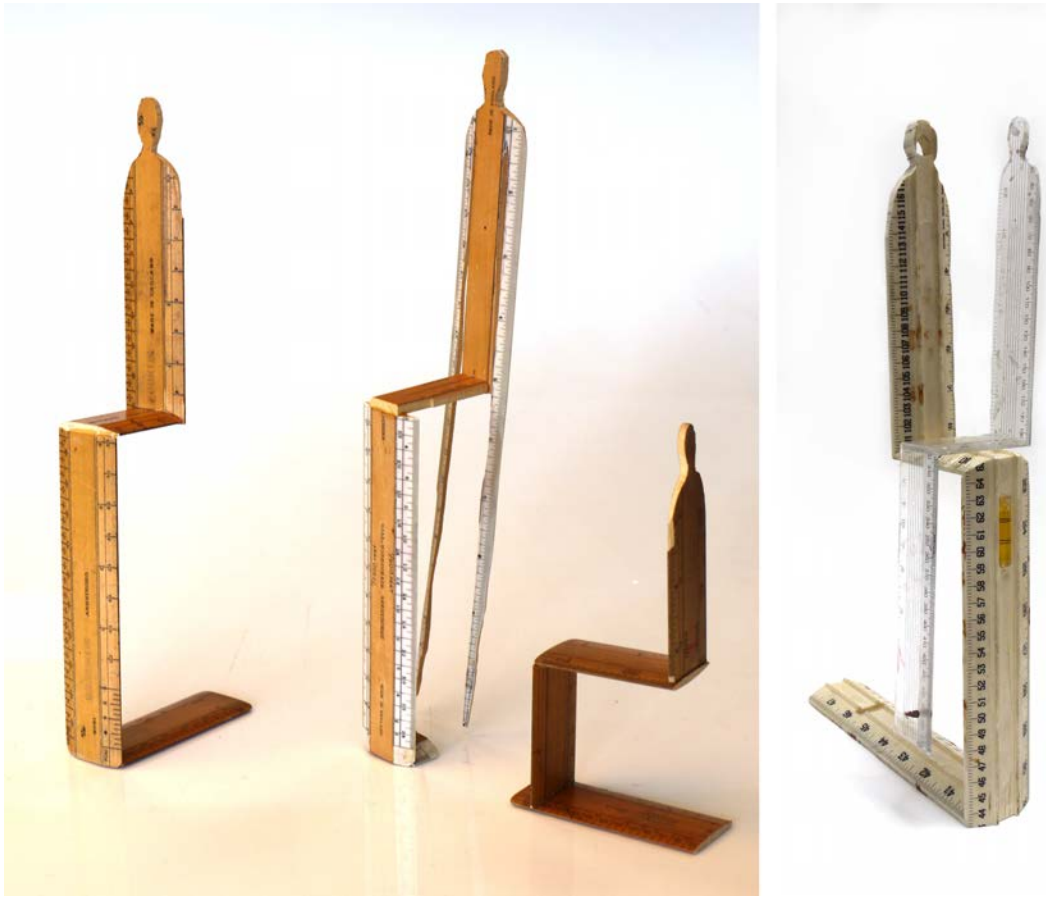


Fig.141. Abrams, J (October 2016) *Measure Up*. Ruler sculptures.

My on-going interest in investigating these notions of maleness and masculinity led to a wide body of research in this area. I was particularly interested in Grayson Perry's *The Descent of Man* (2016), where he deliberates on contemporary attitudes to masculinity noting *that many forms...can be very destructive and that masculinity might be a straightjacket that is keeping men from 'being themselves* (p.3). What he describes as the quintessential 'default man' (p.14) is seldom under *an existential threat and therefore his identity has tended to remain unexamined* (p.17). Default Man *masquerades very efficiently as 'normal'* (p.19) and anybody straying from this apparent normalcy is seen as deviant.

Masculinity, *its behaviours feelings and aesthetics* in Perry's view feels historically based whilst in opposition to this *feminism has always been forward-looking* (p.90).

Women seem to embrace change, not just in society, but in themselves. In order to take up this expanding role she needs to adapt, learn new skills, become more confident. Men, though, always seem to be harking back to some mythical golden age (for men) when men were 'men'. A time of hunting (dangerous, thrilling), a time of war (dangerous,

thrilling and boring), a time of heavy industry (dangerous, boring), times when all the vintage man equipment - anger, violence, physical strength – could be put through its paces. A time also when men dominated women. (p.91).

For many men, progressive feminist arguments can [therefore] feel like a defeat, a slippery slope to redundancy and humiliation (p.91) and it is because of this that contemporary notions on masculinity can seem so divisive and retrograde. Perry postulates that men need a different viewpoint, one less backward-looking and one more open-looking and progressive.

Perry notes that the *hardware* of male and female brains *are pretty much the same* (p.107) but they are consistently given different *software* by a rigid and detrimental nurturing process from birth onwards. Boys grow up *steeped in a culture* predicated on less *emotional complexity*, which then leads to *emotional illiteracy* (p.108). Boys, then men, aspire to dominant roles which are *foot soldiers for an imaginary leader that sits in the top corner office of our unconscious*. This leader is an *idealised self*, a self that *all men carry around in their heads, tutting, sighing and sniping when they don't come up to scratch* (p.118). This ingrained and self-destructive male bully needs to be psychologically stood up to if a man is confront and to break free from this interior dictatorship.

Echoing darkly inside us is this archetypal man who not only does not fit us very well but also doesn't want us to talk about it. This idealised man is very brittle. He is so fragile that a casual rejection or slight can cause him to shatter and collapse (p.118).

This confluence of fragility and intractability is highly destructive with Perry noting that *the single biggest cause of death for men under the age of forty-five in the UK is suicide* (p.119).

Perry also discusses aspects of male sexual behaviour. He comments that *for many men, sex boils and ferments just below the surface of a crust of civility* (p.126) and that one of the most profound reasons that *old-fashioned gender power relationships* are maintained is sexual (p.130). The prevalence of easily accessible online-porn has caricatured this status, with many young men in particular, assuming that normal sex is solely about *hours of pumping, high-intensity intercourse with shaven supermodels* (p.132) and has nothing to do with more complex relationships and interactions. This complexity versus the purely libidinous has become one consistent theme in many of my own compositions and paintings.

At the end of *The Descent of Man*, Perry envisions a future for masculinity that becomes carefully introspective and steadily adaptive. He finishes with a prescient manifesto list:

Men's rights

The right to be vulnerable

The right to be weak

The right to be wrong

The right to be intuitive

The right not to know

The right to be uncertain

The right to be flexible

The right not to be ashamed of any of these. (p.145)



Fig.142. Abrams, J (2016) *Ownership chair detail.*. Salvaged chair, salvaged keys, wood, bucket and screws.

This list also seems congruent with some of my own starting points and concerns. In creating my *Ownership* chair (fig.130) I set about creating an expression of male vulnerability juxtaposed with a strident 'façade' of strength and immutability. This masquerade alludes to my understanding of feminist theory particularly with reference to Anneke Smelik. Her questioning of how the male body can become *the object of the female gaze or of another male gaze* in film (Smelik, 2015) was in my mind as I cut a tall male/phallus shape from salvaged timber and conjoined it to a chair I had found disposed of in the street. I then carefully screwed in a large number of keys (reclaimed from my *Key Shed*, fig.3) into the wood, each one of them pointing at an angle upwards. Through using the key motif, I wanted to conjure notions of male ownership and entitlement and wanted the shimmering result, coupled with the red leather, to allude to the authority of a throne. On closer inspection this vision becomes tarnished as the keys are corroded and unusable coupled with the cracked and broken leather that has seen better days.

The image of the male body as object of a look is fraught with ambivalences, repressions and denials. Like the masquerade, the notion of spectacle has such strong feminine connotations, that for a male performer to be put on display or to don a mask threatens his very masculinity. Because the phallus is a symbol and a signifier, no man can fully symbolise it. Although the patriarchal male subject has a privileged relation to the phallus, he will always fall short of the phallic ideal. (Smelik, 2015)

Whilst painstakingly constructing this piece, I kept my supply of keys in front of me on the chair in an old bucket (fig.142). Gradually on reflection, I began to understand this bucket as part of the sculptural form, the bucket half filled with rusted keys suggesting an on-going supply or maintenance of a worthless ideal.

As I manufactured this chair, I found two abandoned chairs that I placed on top of each other to store in my studio. It slowly occurred to me that their 'happenstance' combination (fig.143) felt like another appropriate and potent statement on my themes: one broken chair in a coexistent relationship with another unified by colour and species but little more besides.



Fig.143. Abrams, J (2016) *Chair on chair*. Salvaged chairs.

This work led me to ruminate on my specific working process and some of its self-defined confines. In order to break free of these parameters I purposefully set out to challenge my modes of practice, and because of this I experimented with creation within virtual reality environments. Although superficially conflicting with my artistic interests, I found this process, after an awkward and self-conscious start, to be surprisingly insightful and

engaging. The virtual reality environment permitted me to construct my two dimensional drawings and paintings quickly in three-dimensions, in virtual spaces around me which were unhindered by structural concerns or the forces of gravity. In swift movements I could interweave my bodies and create three-dimensional interactions that would be almost impossible in reality. These environments felt liberating although the images produced in screen-shot formation (fig.144) show little of this potentiality. Whilst not wishing to proceed further for the time being into this electronic artistic world, I felt I learnt a lot from these tangential studies that will inform future sculptural and painting ideas.

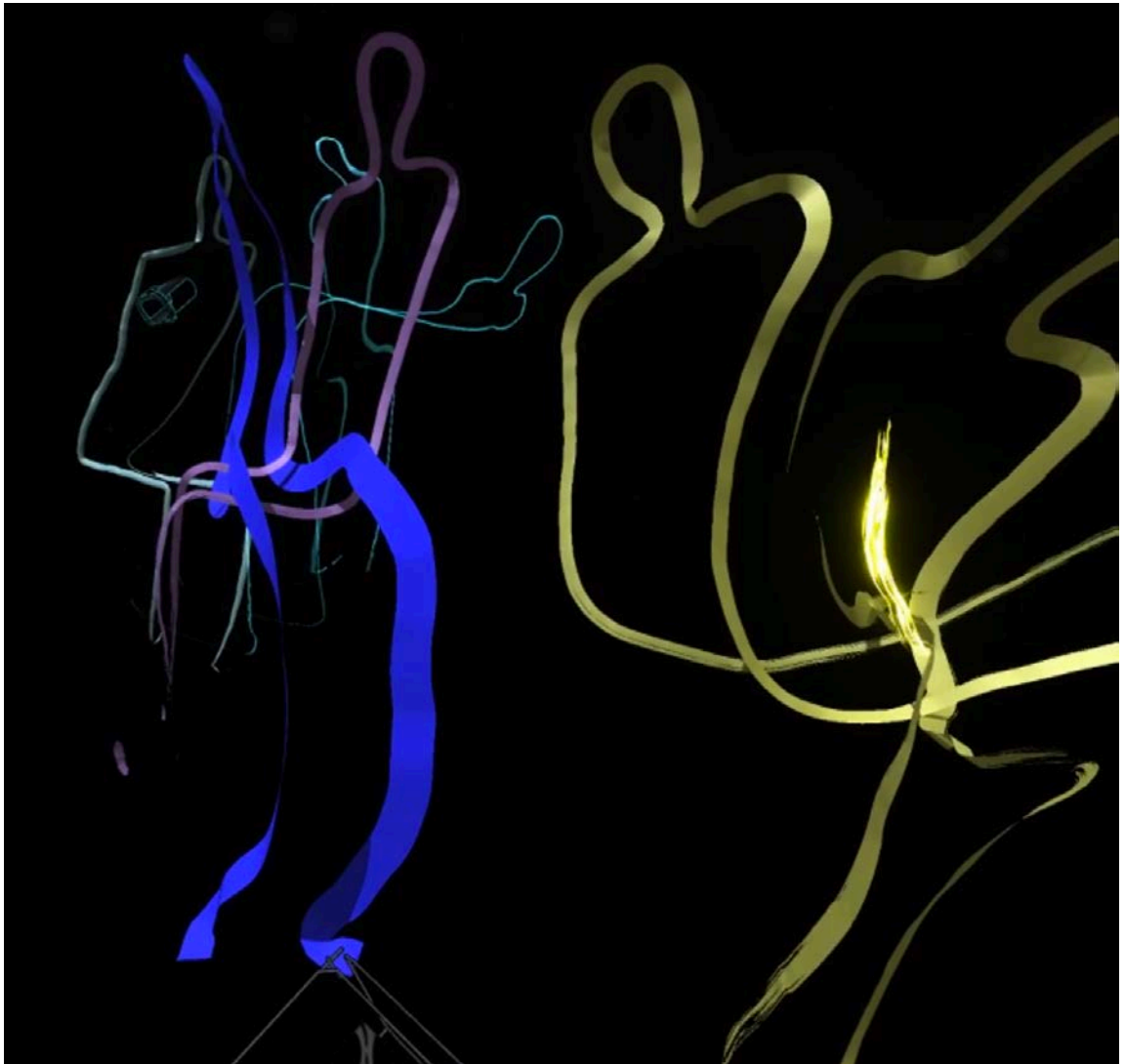


Fig.144. Abrams, J (2016) *Virtual Reality* screen capture.

I presented all this work alongside images of my *Chaired By..* exhibition at my seminar presentation in November 2016 and gathered useful feedback and input.

One supervisor responded:

Jake showed a range of work in his seminar that he has done over the past few years culminating in an exhibition in the foyer gallery at Knights Park at Kingston University. His work encompasses sculpture, painting and drawing and more recently he has had access to virtual reality software.

There are many threads in his work but the form of the chair as a metaphor for the human condition in all its pathos has remained a constant theme throughout his time on the Doctorate. He makes paradoxical additions to these bits of furniture, adding or conjoining absurd juxtapositions that surprise, disturb and delight in equal measure. He also anthropomorphises these chairs to great effect, creating narratives that allude to the gamut of human frailties.

He showed a series of small ink drawings and added that they had been drawn at a dark time in his life. These had a power and resonance that spoke of a sense of letting go, where the intentionality is relaxed and inhibition or design is minimized. I think artists often have to 'let go' in the process of creating work that challenges their own preconceptions and surprises them. These images seemed to do just that.

Other feedback commented on my views on masculinity and one commentator felt that the work was much more about a fluid and ambiguous interrelational sexuality. I found these comments especially useful as this had been a theme that I had been preoccupied with but had not managed to articulate in such an exact way.

Another respondent discussed the tension in the images between the very precise and the gestural. Again, I found the ensuing debate pertinent and constructive. Both commentators were captivated by the coexistence between the spontaneous/unconscious expression and the very precise. This for them, conjured a tense quiet deliberateness in the work that was placed in contrast to a vivid and emotional psychological space, which they found affecting.

Another respondent was interested in examining the impetus behind the skeletal elongated forms I was in the habit of creating within my artworks and the reasons behind many being

footless and what she described as *maimed*. Citing Giacometti, the debate discussed the personal and psychological meanings behind such distortion.

At this seminar I was also reminded about the work of Robert Gober who I subsequently spent time exploring further. I was interested in how he presented notions of gender and also how he presented darkly surreal humour in his sculpture. In *Untitled* (fig.145) a sack is slumped in the corner of a room. Half of it transforms into a male torso, half female. For me this piece is about how both genders are so similar and intertwined, the differences being so minimal, yet in our minds so profound.



Fig.145. Gober, R (1991) *Untitled*. <https://valentinagurarie.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/robert-gober-6.jpg> (Last Accessed 19th. December 2016).



Fig.146. Gober, R (1986) *Covered Armchair*. In *Robert Grober*. (1993)
London: Serpentine Gallery. p. 33.

In *Covered Armchair* (fig.146) we are delivered into a pretty domestic interior with a twee chair residing in a corner. However, on closer inspection the viewer notices that the wallpaper is comprised of genitalia drawn like locker room graffiti. It is a surprising juxtaposition and one that makes the beholder re-evaluate the covered chair. You notice the incongruous legs and then perceive the sweetness of its cover as a sham. The artwork insinuates a dark and insalubrious truth hidden behind a domestic idyll.

In this period I also studied aspects of the writings and creations of Mike Kelley as I was interested in how he presented and articulated his ideas about his object based work. In *Gussied Up* (fig.147), he presents us with a work-table on top of which pieces of furniture

are held together by or ‘wearing’ children’s hand-knitted clothing. The scene he creates is both humorous and disconcerting. At once it alludes to personal history and nostalgia, evoked by the objects themselves but also at the same time it reminds us about the relative worth of objects, the throwaway and crafted handmade versus the ‘high-art’ artefact. In his creation of artworks that include the hand-made he is *mobilizing the unsung, labour-intensive, personal-yet-anonymous investments of craft, long vilified or disparaged by the masculine high-art tradition* (Kelley, 1993 p.67). He is also, especially with his combinations and conglomerations of toys, referring to post-Freudian theory with particular reference to Winnicott’s theories of transitional objects and psychological relinquishment. Kelley’s objects are frequently soiled and broken, amalgamated and fused and this further implies transition but a transition that is far from perfect and wholesome. Instead, it is complicated, transgressional and flawed.



Fig.147. Kelley, R (1992) *Gussied Up*. In *Mike Kelley*.(1993) London: Phaidon. p. 37.

At my November 2016 seminar, the work of the photographer Michael Wolf and his *Bastard Chairs* series were mentioned to me. I found that these improvised creations (fig.148), recorded on trips around Hong Kong and China, held real power for me. The project reminded me of Richard Wentworth’s investigations into *Making Do and Getting By* (2015) with each chair exhibiting an ingenious, thrifty and thoughtful home-spun transformation. Wolf imagined the chairs that he recorded had *had a long and hard life* and

held *strong character*[s] (Wolf, 2002 p.7). For me, the particular combinations of materials used and their potentials for expressive interpolation helped me reconsider some of the materials I had been employing within my own sculptural making and I resolved to experiment still further in future constructions.



Fig.148. Wolf, M (2002) *Bastard Chairs*. <https://worksthatwork.com/1/bastard-chairs>
(Last Accessed 20th. December 2016).

This period of study was the last before progressing towards my Doctorate submission. It has been a useful staging post where I have been able to contemplate a range of options for my final exhibition. My show *Chaired By...* at the Platform Gallery proved to be an effective examination of my proposition to deliberately place different components of my artistic practice together in busy unison. I learnt a great deal from this presentation. Devising a configuration that allows the pieces to interrelate and not clash requires careful delineation within the allocated space. I have also learnt that designing such a proposition takes time and careful planning and that this planning itself has limitations. It is not until the pieces are actually placed in the gallery and tried out in a series of varying arrangements that final decisions can be made. This process can be protracted and that I must allow sufficient time for the consideration of these permutations.

SUPPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES

2017



Fig.149. Abrams, J (2017) *Bookchair*. Wooden chair structure containing printed book of chair photographs.

After submitting my Professional Doctorate report in April 2017, I focussed my attention on preparing, producing and refining practical work in preparation for my doctoral exhibition (June 2017). In devising this work, I continued to examine issues concerning individual identity, notions of masculinity and deliberations on the power and pertinence of the chair motif. In this intense period of practical study I also found time to visit a series of relevant exhibitions and artistic installations that were to prove useful in assisting in the conception of my final show. In addition to this I was interested in further researching theoretical writings on masculinity. I did this primarily through looking at Berger's *Constructing Masculinity* (1995) and Perchuk's *The Masculine Masquerade* (1995).

During a visit to Oslo I visited the *Holocaust Monument* (2006) permanent installation by Antony Gormley (fig. 150) and was engaged by its stark and simple use of the chair form to poignantly commemorate a tragic moment in Norway's history. Eight simple metal chair forms face outward towards the fjord from where Jews were deported on their journey towards Auschwitz. The chairs summon up ideas on the very ordinariness of the individuals that were dispatched towards extermination. They are grim reminders of the victims' terrible wait to be transported but also invite the beholder to stop, sit, remember and reflect on the issues involved. The chairs are scattered with large spaces around them and this positioning itself insinuates ideas on loneliness or void. Some chairs are placed together suggesting the transportation of couples, others are missing a seat that, to me, reiterates the rupture that has been cruelly created by such an event. Gormley manages to skilfully imbue his monument with a poignancy that avoids sentimentality.



Fig.150. Gormley, A (2006) *Holocaust Monument*. Oslo, Norway.

Anselm Kiefer's *Walhalla* exhibition at The White Cube Gallery in Bermondsey, London (2017), also had a bearing on my doctorate exhibition planning. I was particularly interested in how Kiefer brought together his two and three-dimensional images together in proximity to each other.

One gallery's walls and ceiling was completely lined with lead sheeting creating a dark and ominous atmosphere into which were placed a dormitory of hospital beds with lead blankets and pillows. A foreboding and poisonous atmosphere is skilfully evoked alluding to terminal decay and disease. It is *gleefully, monstrously theatrical and at the same time subtle, rich, poetic* (Jones, 2016).

The dark and lugubrious mood disappears as you enter the brightly lit adjoining gallery but then on closer inspection of each artwork this mood still prevails. In one piece the skeletal components of a wheelchair resting on cracked and parched ground are confined within a tall glass box (fig.151). The padded seat of the chair has been substituted with lead pillows and a jagged piece of lead hangs ominously above it. The perpetual agony alluded to in its title suggests there is no escape from the ramifications of human bellicosity. It is an entrapped concept just as the chair is entrapped in its' museum like vitrine.



Fig.151 Kiefer, A (2016) *Amfortas*. Wheel Chair in Glass vitrine. White Cube, Bermondsey, London.

I was also interested in Annette Messager's work and how it was displayed at her *Avec Et Sans Raisons* exhibition at the Marian Goodman Gallery in London (2017). In one space everyday objects such as coat hangers, mobile phones, wedding rings and keys are suspended from the ceiling (fig.152). They are outsize leather clad versions of there original selves. Everyday objects become fetishized and sexualised to an absurd metaphorical and actual overbearing scale. The wires that hang the objects serve to position the objects in careful succession but also serve to imprison them in a parody alluding to children's

puppetry. They signify that these objects are locked in sadistic modes of male control over women.

This puppetry analogy is further developed in another room of the gallery where a net full of red intestinal and fallopian fabric forms are suspended from the ceiling as if taken from an outsized fisherman's haul (fig.153). Entwined in this bundle is a forlorn and spread-eagled Pinocchio: a sign of youthful boyish innocence yet also signifier of made-up falsehoods. The net becomes a message about invasive and ruinous male proprietorship tangled up with a disembowelling form of anti-female hysterectomy.



Fig.152. Messenger, A (2016) *Daily*. Marion Goodman Gallery, London.



Fig.153. Messenger, A (2016) *Daily*. Marion Goodman Gallery, London.

At this juncture of my study, I was interested to further explore theory behind notions of masculinity. In his essay on *Masculinity as Masquerade* (Perchuk, 1995), Harry Brod contends that understanding masculinity is at a *propitious moment* (p.19) and that gender is a role *not a biological condition* and as in a theatrical role *the core element in the concept...is that a role is separate and distinct from the person playing it. A role is a performance, an enactment of a persona different from that of an actor* (p.14).

It means that believing gender roles to be natural is self-contradictory, for to speak the language of role is to invoke the distinction between nature and culture, to say precisely that what is being discussed is not natural but cultural. Further, most people conceptualize gender identity as part of one's true self. When people reach down to a core sense of themselves as masculine or feminine, they tend to believe that they have reached something essentially true about themselves. But to believe in the existence of gender as a role is to disavow the belief that one's gender is a part of one's essential self, because the conception of gender as a role entails the separation of one's gender from one's self (p.14).

Brod develops this position by then reminding us that roles insinuate a lack of differentiation. Actually gender roles are multifaceted and involve a panoply of none-identical nuance. There are in fact a series of female and male *roles* as they differ *by class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, mental and physical ability and various other categories* (p.15).

Gender is fundamentally a codified form of activity, a social practice, attaching itself to individuals as they internalize social structures, rather than an attribute or trait of individuals externalized to be writ large in society. As such, gender is a social relation practised in social interactions, and therefore not reducible to “roles” inculcated by society and learned either on one’s own or in the “separate spheres” of female and male “cultures,” nor reductable to the unfolding of instinctive psychosexual “drives.” (p.16).

In traditionally understood realms of women there has been a marked change where men have taken similar positions. *The technologization of work and war...and the dynamics of advanced capitalism, which seeks ever-expanding markets, have turned the male body from a site of production to a site of consumption, as seen, for example, in the growth of the male fashion and cosmetics industries and the greater public display of the male body as sexualized object* (p.19).

Helaine Posner notes in her essay on *Masculinity in Recent Art* (Perchuk, 1995) that:

To be constructed as a male means to perpetually exhibit a complex array of cultural codes that signal one’s sexual identity and family, work, and social status. These signals are under constant scrutiny, certainly by women, but no less by other men who engage in a rigorous and unending regimen of “inter-male surveillance”. Mastering one’s gender role is a strenuous endeavour, different, yet no more demanding, for the male than the female (p.21)

Posner then proceeds to examine Mary Kelly’s installation *Gloria Patri* (Glory be to the Father) (fig.154) in which she aims to elucidate *hierarchical and paternal order* (p.22) in relation to the military, particularly with reference to the machismo posturing behind the Iraq War. In this artwork an ostentatious series of polished metal shields are positioned in

layers around a stonewall. *It is a glistening- and intimidating- spectacle that refers to two of the outward signs of masculine glory and pride: the sports trophy and the military medal* (p.23). Some trophies feature etched slogans that attest to bellicose statements made by US soldiers to the media, others feature a litany of narratives of male doings *such as fishing for trout, a turn at bat, the birth of a son, boyhood rebellion, and a physical workout* (p.23). Yet behind these statements Kelly urges her audience to question their simplistic nature and de facto question simplistic notions of masculinity revealing real *vulnerability beneath* [their] *hard and polished surface* (p.23).

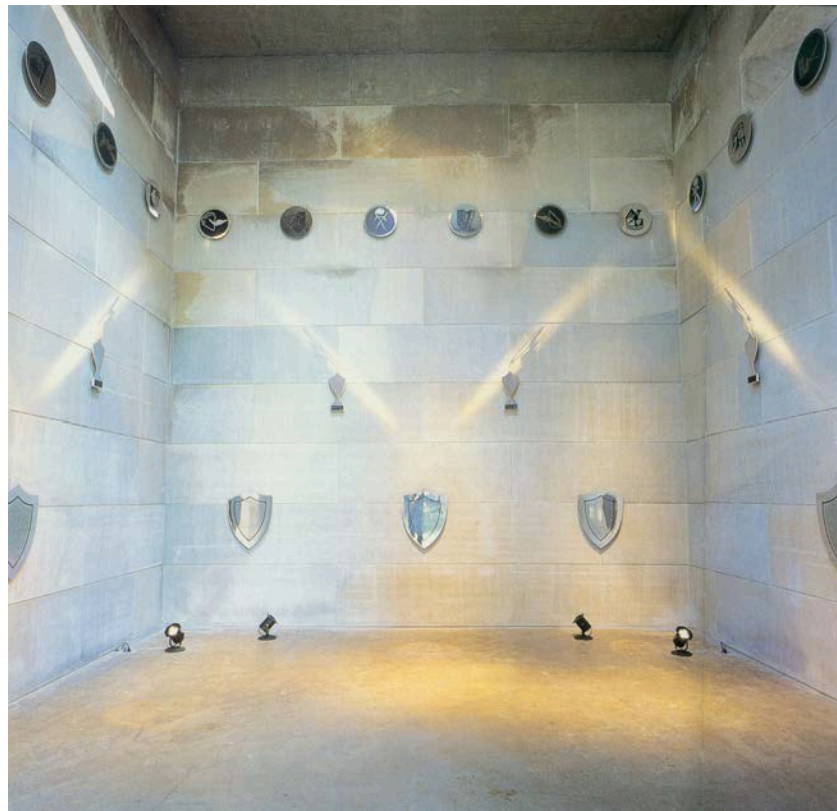


Fig.154. Kelly, M (1992) *Gloria Patri* 12 disks, 6 trophies and 5 shields.

The Masculine Masquerade exhibition. MIT List Visual Arts Centre, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
http://www.brianprince.com/file_cabinet/marykelly/SCRIPT/IMAGES/06_gloria_patri/062208%20NEW/install.jpg.
 (Last accessed 3rd. May 2017).

During this period, my practical working process continued to consolidate and evolve. I had previously developed a process that began by producing a number of drawings in small scale in my A5 notebook (fig. 155). This book contained a set of pre-printed grids that proved useful in the organisation and iteration of initial layouts. As a counterpoint to some of the more rigid and precise shapes that I created in this way, I moved on to brake down these confines producing a series of more fluid and amorphous shapes (fig.156). These new

forms helped instigate the establishment of a wider variety of painted investigations and outcomes.



Fig.155 Abrams, J (2017) A5 grid notebook.



Fig.156 Abrams, J (2017) A5 grid notebook.

After creating a large number of these small-scale concepts I then proceeded to review and evaluate them to assess which I would be interested in working further upon. I then developed a selection of these as small scale painted versions on 20cm. square canvas board (fig.157). At this time, I initiated a process of varying the size of these small paintings trying versions at 15cm. and 20cm. square in order to determine if this deviation could assist in the creation of new iterations and forms (fig. 158 & 159).

In *Careful Equilibrium* (fig.157) my masculine and feminine forms coexist staged in a precarious counterbalance. The weight of their bodies is too heavy for their spindly legs to sustain. They are at once at one but inexorably destined to collapse apart.



Fig.157 Abrams, J (2017) *Careful Equilibrium*. 20cm x 20cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas board.



Fig.158 Abrams, J (2017) 15cm x 15cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas and 10 x 10cm. Acrylic on canvas board.



Fig.159 Abrams, J (2017) 10 x 10cm. Acrylic on canvas board.

During a seminar presentation (February 2017) I received useful feedback debating how the more successful paintings retained layers of ambiguity between the foreground, background and the interplay of figures. These figures became *shadows of themselves*, *ghost-like* and *melted* into each other. For them these visions created a strong *sense of recollection* that *allud[ed] to a history of activity*. I was interested in these interpolations especially those that promulgated notions of remembrance.

There was also engaging discussion about the scale of the work that I was producing. Some questioned the reasons behind my desire to make larger paintings noting that some of the smaller incarnations were effective in their own right. The audience had first viewed the images as digital projections in the seminar and then reviewed a series of the actual pieces (20cm sq. paintings) afterwards. One respondent proposed that I could simply project these images if I wanted to create large-scale versions as the projected images retained a

captivating *provisionality and ambiguity*. Another suggested a series of my paintings could be projected in order to emulate how I put together my slide presentation. They valued the digital transition of the images that I made (using the presentation tool *Prezi*) and felt that this sequential metamorphosis might be employed to exhibit my images in a gallery setting: these transitions accentuating notions of transience and intangibility.

At this stage of my endeavour I was also interested to experiment with more vivid colouration within my paintings. I made a succession of 20cm. square paintings that involved much more strident juxtapositions of colours than I had used before. My previous palette had synchronised with a coinciding melancholic frame of mind. Nevertheless I wished to examine whether bolder combinations could still serve to communicate such emotional states. I set about experimenting with polarities across the colour spectrum in hope of creating oppositional currents within my work (fig.160). Many of these investigations proved unsuccessful as I felt that they not manage to conjure an atmosphere that corresponded to my own psychological states. I found that I could partially ameliorate this by applying a subsequent more neutral colour. In *Stand* (fig. 161) I partially obliterated a base coat of vivid orange in such a way. I was interested in allowing the foundation colour to seep through. To me this was conjured an atmosphere of reminiscence to a vibrant and vivid past.



Fig.160 Abrams, J (2017). 20cm x 20cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas board



Fig.161 Abrams, J (2017) *Stand*. 20cm x 20cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas board

Concurrent with this process of reviewing and refining my work, I also maintained the process of creating ideas and drawings in A3 notebooks. These books had remained a valuable personal forum for me to examine ideas in an uninhibited manner. They also provided practicable embarkation points for new ideas and directions of study. In a series of black and white ink drawings (fig.162) I investigated the juxtapositions of gestural mark making with refined linear marks. In part, I created this tension as an expression of the polarities inherent in gender. The drawings embodied a refined and safe normality set against a turbulent inner 'truth'.



Fig.162. Abrams, J (2017) A3 notebook.

Leading up to my doctoral exhibition, I had the useful opportunity to work in a much larger studio space than I usually had access to. This permitted me to work on and reflect upon a series of larger paintings concurrently (fig.163 & 164).



Fig.163. Abrams, J (2017) Paintings on Canvas in production. Kingston University, London.



Fig.164. Abrams, J (2017) Paintings on Canvas in production. Kingston University, London.



Fig.165. Abrams, J (2017) *Murmur*. 143 x 143 cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas.

In *Murmur* (fig.165) a male figure is perched on the back of a female figure: his pointed heels prod into her calves. In this large painting I am trying to retain a nebulous movement from the fore to background. The figures perform their act on monumentalised on a plinth yet they meld into and oscillate against their environs. In *Sitting Comfortably* (fig.166) the two sexes sit more equitably yet they are sliced into sharp slithers: ruined yet still dependant on eachother. In *Three-piece* (fig.167) a third character of diminutive stature provides the support for the larger players. His form is reiterated inside of himself in order to suggest an on going perpetuation on the theme of dependency.



Fig.166. Abrams, J (2017) *Sitting Comfortably*. 143 x 143 cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas.



Fig.167. Abrams, J (2017) *Three-piece*. 143 x 143 cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas.

At this stage, I further explored notions of duality within gender. In *Reciprocity* (fig. 168) I conjoined a male and female-seated character. From this I became interested in ways of portraying more complex derivations on the notion of masculinity. In *Diverge/Converge* (fig.169) legs protrude all around the dual figures to insinuate multiple derivations. They remain teetering on the edge of their performance podium. In the subsequent image (right) the female figure sits outside of the now angular machine-like metal male legs: outside the cage but still dependant on it.



Fig.168. Abrams, J (2017) *Reciprocity*. 91 x 91 cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas.



Fig.169. Abrams, J (2017) *Diverge/Converge & Diverge/Converge2* 30 x 30 cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas.

I was aware, as I create these two-dimensional paintings that in my mind they remain conceived as a derivation of three-dimensional sculpture and as I render them, I equate the forms that I create with sculptural installations. The bodies that are perched precariously on their plinths or stages inhabit, for me, solid yet somewhat ethereal 'real' space. I envision them as near flat and folded forms occupying imaginary existent expanses. In my mind, these spaces emanate far around the margins of the canvas or paper. I imagine that they are the, what I see as, lonely and contemplative spaces the viewer, exists in too.

With these thoughts in mind I have continued to experiment with the creation of actual three-dimensional chair structures. I conceived a new set of chair/male characters fabricated from more ephemeral and fragile materials. I first conducted experiments with paper structures to be suspended at chair height from the ceiling. These were to be strong male shapes constructed in faint and flimsy materials daintily sewn together. I made several forms using different papers including semi transparent stock and tracing paper. I then moved on to trial a series of delicate translucent fabrics that, in my mind, proved to be more successful (fig.170).



Fig.170. Abrams, J (2017) Polyester fabric body with red thread.

At the same time I continued creating sculptural forms through amalgamating salvaged objects. I revisited several earlier three-dimensional pieces to make minor alterations. In *Penny-whistle* (fig.171) I added a plastic flute from a Christmas cracker and a children's

building block to a sculptural form that I had made in a previous year, as I was interested in expressing facile aspects of the male libido.



Fig.171 Abrams, J (2017) *Penny-whistle*. Scrap wood, building block and plastic flute. 59 x 18x 15cm.

In *Cupids-Arrow* (fig. 172) I pierced a salvaged chair with an archer's arrow wanting this simple combination to allude to notions of gendered power and phallic eruption.



Fig.172 Abrams, J (2017) *Cupid's arrow*. Salvaged chair and archery arrow.

In addition to these, I constructed a small chair to house a selection of my photographs of discarded chairs that I had collated into a small book (fig.160). I had been taking these photographs throughout my study and I wanted to feature them as part of my exhibition as I felt they represented an important strand of my research. For me, each chair I encountered held anthropomorphised potency. I imagined them as if they were particular characters: once useful and effective now useless and forlorn.



Fig.173 Abrams, J (2017) *Seated*. Doctorate *Viva* exhibition view, UEL, London.

For my doctorate submission at UEL I wanted to develop some of the strategies that I had employed within my *Chaired By...* show at The Platform Gallery in Kingston (2016) but this time I planned to create a clearer delineation between my paintings and the rest of my work (fig.173). I decided to utilize the larger expanses of wall space to exhibit a configuration of my paintings on canvas and keep the other work congregated in adjacent areas. I attempted a series of permutations on this theme finally settling on one, which in my mind proposed four distinct yet congruent sectors. I had experimented with placing my three-dimensional work in various positions extruding into an area reserved for the painting but did not want this work to interrupt the simplicity and order of the area of paintings. The areas had to house almost conflicting arrays of work but be united by the overriding themes and also the consistency of the chair motif. It was to prove an ambitious arrangement but one that I wanted to succeed with.

As part of the preparation for the exhibition, I constructed a series of box-frames in order to house a selection of drawings from my A3 sketchbooks and some of my smaller sculptural pieces (fig. 174). After seminar input concerning a previous exhibition, I attempted to keep the forms simple in order not to visually interfere with their content. I was able to use a sectioned off area of my space to congregate these boxed forms and several of my chair sculptures (fig. 175). This section of the exhibition clustered an edited selection of my working process and examples of my broader ruminations on my subject matter.



Fig.174. Abrams, J (2017) *He*. Amalgamated plastic toys and wood in wooden box frame.



Fig.175. Abrams, J (2017) *Seated*. Doctorate *Viva* exhibition view, UEL, London.



Fig.176. Abrams, J (2014). *Stage*. Acrylic on canvas. 91cmx 91cm.

I understand *Stage* (fig.176) as a significant artwork within my doctorate submission. For me this piece represented an essential shift in my artistic trajectory and it manages to typify several of the essential themes within the study. Two characters perch precariously upon a stage or plinth: each dependent on each other to maintain their uncertain equilibrium. This uncertainty mirrors the uncertainty of the masculine role postulated by my doctoral title. The *Stage* of the title is the stage where this gender performance takes place alluding to theory that gender is indeed *not a biological condition* but in fact a *performance* or *enactment of a persona* (Perchuk, p.14). Masculinity is not absolute and it is inherently fluid and changeable (in different societies and times) and it is dependent on its counterpart to exist.

This codependence is nuanced and ambiguous. To highlight this uncertainty, I set about rendering this painting in fluid gestural strokes that glide in deliberate opposition to the solidity of the figure shapes and stage: reiterating the subject's contradiction. Fluidity versus solidity; they are at the heart of my understanding of gender. In addition to this, the colours and tones I utilize are meant to assist in suggesting these themes. There is a deliberate coldness to the palette that aims to display an emotional frigidity and anonymity as well as representing a lonely and dispassionate vision of gender, sex and relationships. It is as if there is a gloomy fog that drifts around the subject: rendering its themes apparent yet difficult to decipher. In addition to this, I was careful to retain the original fragile pencil lines within the finished piece, as I felt these too alluded to provisionality in understanding sexuality and gender. By deliberately keeping panels of the original primed canvas void, I aimed to develop this theme further: the blank expanses evoking empty realms of possibility.



Fig.177. Abrams, J (2016) *Glass and Steel*. Square painting on canvas. 127 x 127cm.

In *Glass and Steel* (fig.177) I further developed these themes on a larger scale. The two figures in this painting are entwined and dolefully confront each other in a similar co-dependency to the previous painting. Their imagined three-dimensional forms are fabricated in one-dimensional 'flat-pack' medium. They are manufactured, according to my title, in materials that hold similar yet contradictory characteristics. The metal is cold, strong and hard, the glass possesses the same attributes but will easily shatter if it falls. I deliberately leave the interpretation about which figure is made from which material ambiguous in order to again reiterate the above positions on flexible understanding of gender. Combining abstraction and figuration, the painting aims to evoke an emotional remoteness that is both revelatory but also secretive. These figures also perform on a precipitous stage. Each is dependent on each other but also inexorably entrapped. In this painting the fore and backgrounds are more rigidly defined through contrasting tones. Here, I have deliberately rendered the component figures less amorphous and more exact in order to emphasise their material make-up.



Fig.178 Abrams, J (2017) *Correspondence*. 20cm x 20cm. Acrylic on gesso primed canvas board.

In *Correspondence* (fig.178) I returned to working on a smaller-scale in order to create an intimacy between viewer and subject matter. In *Glass and Steel* (fig.177), I had worked on a larger scale as a sort of bold proclamation of the issues involved but here I aimed to invite a more intimate contemplation. In this painting masculinity and femininity are rendered as less distinct and much more complex. Figures are contorted and change from masculine to feminine to both. Their performance remains precarious but now feels emboldened. The uncertain nature of masculinity (and for that matter femininity) feels unrepressed and confident as if it had been somehow liberated. The palette I employ in this painting attempts to be as carefully balanced as its subject matter but the stronger pigmentation alludes to the greater confidence of its theme.

Once more, in this painting I contrast quick gestural painting marks with careful and pronounced forms. By doing so I aim to set up dynamic tension within the piece that further restates the gender tensions. I smooth the canvas surfaces I paint upon with layers of gesso until I achieve a bright matt density of whiteness. This not only serves as an effective undersurface that facilitates my rapid brush movements but also provides the areas that I choose to leave blank with an intense solidity that accentuates, these areas of actual and metaphorical void.

Throughout my doctoral submission I kept all the paintings at a square format in order to have a consistent form throughout. The squares also aim to underscore the rigidity and repetition of the theatrical gender roles being played within them. The square parameters become, in my mind, a sort of perpetual enclosure or imprisonment.

These two-dimensional paintings are conceived as a derivation of three-dimensional sculpture. As I render them, I equate the forms with sculptural installations. The bodies that are perched precariously on their plinths or stages inhabit, for me, solid yet somewhat ethereal 'real' space. I envision them as near flat and folded forms occupying imaginary existent expanses. In my mind, these spaces emanate far around the margins of the canvas or paper. I imagine them to be lonely and contemplative spaces the viewer might exist in too.

I understand the theatrical stage created in the paintings can be also equated with the plinths that monumentalised (and often male) sculpture resides upon within our galleries and public civic spaces. The height that the paintings are placed on the wall of an

exhibition have a direct relationship to the height and status of the 'sculptures' I conceive. They are 'tongue in cheek' phallic totems to masculinity, male art and male hierarchies.

Placing 'real' sculptural objects next to paintings of what appear to be sculptures was a key strategy in the conception of my doctoral exhibition. I wanted the two to co-exist and invite reflection on their congruent yet contradictory content and form. Many of my three-dimensional sculptural pieces are imbued with a sardonic humour and many confront masculine notions of sexuality. Gray Watson writes:

Sex is about much more than sex. Arguably, it is the single most important key to unlocking the secrets of human motivation...Art, while lacking the kinds of analytical tools that theoretical disciplines possess, has a correspondingly greater freedom to explore the intuitive and imaginative ways, with the potential to lead to still newer and more unexpected insights. It follows that art about sex has, in principle at least, the potential to lead to radically new insights of particularly crucial human importance (p.127)

Much of my work is to do with the tension between cultural concepts of masculinity and current realities of male heterosexual experience. As Watson notes, this is an under-explored area of art practice:

Male heterosexual desire in its patriarchal form can no longer be taken for granted, it is time for men to re-examine their sexuality afresh. There could be an enormous gain if men, and male artists in particular, were to undertake an investigation into male sexual desire analogous to that which women have been undertaking over several decades into female desire, and which feminist-inspired art has played a key role. A start has been made but as yet it is on a comparatively small scale (p.128).

Sexual intercourse, he argues is paradigmatic of the coming together of two entities, and for some artists it is the wider implications of that union that are the most interesting (p.45). This inter-relational aspiration for masculinity and sexuality is at the heart of much of my practice.



Fig .179. Abrams, J. (2015) *All Male*. Salvaged chair, balloon and gaffer tape.

In *All Male* (fig.179) I place together three apparently straightforward elements: a salvaged chair with wonky legs, a balloon and some gaffer tape. The objects used are, in fact, carefully chosen in order to conspire, in my mind, to humorously undermine notions of hegemonic masculinity. The chair is broken, the phallic balloon droops and is a fragile and childish object, the gaffer tape alludes to botched DIY. Dark humour has always permeated my artistic work as I feel it can adeptly prick through to the essence of an issue especially that which involves pretention, iniquitous behaviour or something that needs re-evaluating such as patriarchal structures. Simon Critchley points out in his book *On Humour* (2002) that:

...What goes on in humour is a form of liberation or elevation that expresses something essential to what Plessner calls 'the humanity of the human'

A true joke...lets us see the familiar defamiliarized, the ordinary made extra-ordinary and the real rendered surreal... Humour brings about a change of situation, a surrealization of the real (p.9, 10).

There is a serious point to my sardonicism: that of unravelling some of the, what I perceive as, the silliness of patriarchal order. The humour is self-mocking where I aim to shine a light on masculinity through examining my own frailties:

One form of humour is self-persiflage [self-questioning/self-mockery] – a self-persiflage that is subversive does not permit the fronts to strengthen, but instead utilizes travesty to shine through the system and expand itself into liberated spaces (Higgle, p.213).

In *Hairchair* (fig. 180) I hacked the sides off of a salvaged chair and then replaced the back with a figure/phallus shape. Wires (that allude to my greying chest hair) puncture the form, twisting out in an uncomfortable scramble. I represent masculinity here as I do in the paintings as essentially superficial: flat forms that are essentially empty. The chair, once again alludes to a steady everyday quality: so ubiquitous that it almost becomes unseen. Chairs pervade our life but actually are not particularly suited to our anatomical make-up. Their structure have *a strong anthropomorphic aspect...with legs, arms, back and seat* (Massey, p.9) that lends itself to exploring themes around masculinity.

When making or adapting the chairs I purposefully tried to achieve a botched DIY aesthetic as DIY conjures ideas of an almost exclusively male domain. Nails are bent and banged in, screws protrude at angles, and cut parts are not sanded down or made good. The sculpture plainly exhibits its slipshod working process: it all fits together but the message is that there is no fine crafted ideal here- the chairs are roughly put together and might easily fail.



Fig. 180. Abrams, J (November 2015). *Hairchair*. Salvaged chair, wood and wire.

I considered placing my three-dimensional sculptures on plinths to tie in with this theme within the paintings but in the end decided that the chairs held more potency at floor level where they could have the proximity and semblance of everyday use. They aim to invite the viewer to the potential of sitting on them and reflecting on the ideas and concerns raised. I felt that this awkward invitation held more potency than if I was to distance them as artworks on a plinth.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016, *Chaired By..*, Platform Gallery, Kingston University, London.

Exhibition of chair sculptures, paintings and drawings (fig.149).

JOINT EXHIBITIONS

2016. *Doctorate Showcase*, UEL, London. Paintings on canvas and *Unwound*, knitted chair sculpture (fig.150).

2015, *ArtMasters*, Truman Brewery, London. *Staged*, Chair paintings on canvas.

2015, *Make Create*. Crypt Gallery, London.

Loss. Collaborative installation with Margaret Jones, cut-steel and woven yarn (fig.151).

2015. *Doctorate Showcase*, UEL, London. Chair paintings on canvas (fig.152).

2014. *Doctorate Showcase*, UEL, London. Installation artwork of chair sculptures.

2013. *Doctorate Showcase*, UEL, London. Installation artwork of chair sculptures.

2012 *Human Face Exhibition* (Fig.22), Gallery Wooduk Seoul, South Korea. Print work (etchings and screen combinations) examining aspects of person psychology (fig.153).

2012. *Doctorate Showcase*, UEL, London. Installation artwork of chair sculptures.

COMMISSIONS

2016, *The Times*, political commentary Illustrations.

2015, *The Times*, political commentary Illustrations.

2014, *The Times*, political commentary Illustrations.

2014, *Weekly News* Illustration for *Waitrose Weekend*.

2013, *The Times*, Illustrations for political articles.

TEACHING

2016- External Examiner, Plymouth College of Art.

2015- Associate Professor, Illustration Animation, Kingston University.

2015- External Examiner, DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology)

2015, Lectures on British Arts and Design, GVSU
(Grand Valley State University), Grand Rapids, U.S.

2014- SFHEA Awarded a Senior Fellowship of the HEA

2013, *Ideas on Ideas* lecture at NTUA (National Taiwan University of Art),
Taipei, Taiwan.

2012-14, Visiting Lectureship, *Strkerjernet* Kunstskole Oslo, Norway.

2012- External Examiner, Oxford Brookes University, Swindon College.

2012-15 Principal Lecturer, Illustration Animation, Kingston University.

SUMMARY

This study has seen my transition from Illustrator to Artist. At the outset I could not imagine the extent of this transformation, but it has been a substantial and profound experience. It has enabled me to pick apart my practise, to research its deeper rationale and has made me create artistic work incompatible with what had gone before.

The works I have produced whilst undertaking this research have always been personal but also have sought to express wider truths about how people, especially men, behave. By utilizing the chair motif I have sought to lend universality to these preoccupations. The chair has proved a fruitful metaphor. It is one of the functional artefacts, that, in varying forms, most of us employ and all of us coexist every day of our lives; it is ubiquitous and normal. It also holds myriad forms, forms that for me have become eloquent signifiers of the themes I wish to convey. I have anthropomorphised its structure and it continues to assert new meanings.

The doctoral process has reignited my interest in theory. Before embarking on this programme in fine art I had considered doing a doctorate based in design. In retrospect, I am enormously relieved that I chose the direction I did. I believe it has been much more transformative and relevant, however difficult the transition has been. I believe that the

design discourse could have proved confining and that the art debate, on the contrary, has been liberating. It has been complicated and convoluted but entirely engrossing and enlightening.

I became fascinated by the theory behind the ownership of objects in relation to the creation of my artwork. Daniel Miller's *Stuff* (2010) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *The Meaning of Things* (1981) stand out as being especially pertinent. Their contemplations on how gender relates to object theory proved especially thought provoking and I feel that their views have percolated into both my drawn and sculptural artwork. One such example, my *Expectation* ladder chair (fig.128) unites two everyday objects in a phallic statement of unrequited male aspiration.

David Buchbinder's *Studying Men and Masculinity* has also played an important part in shaping my thinking. His thorough overview of patriarchal systems which are so pervasive that they paradoxically almost appear invisible, were instrumental in instigating a whole series of artistic investigations. My chair constructions such as *Ownership* (fig.131) and paintings such as *Anima* (fig.114) attempt to elucidate and expose these themes. After studying his writing, I proceeded to Grayson Perry's musings on masculinity in *The Descent of Man* (2016). This text proved especially consequential, not least because these viewpoints were authored by a practising artist who had regularly brought these themes into his own work.

Throughout this doctoral activity I have considered an array of different artists in relation to my own evolving practice. Louise Bourgeois stands out in my mind as someone who was particularly relevant in the way that she resolutely trawled her own psychological landscape as the basis of her work. Her bold range of mediums was ever-inventive and shone light on her own fragilities. I also felt that Melanie Bonajo's couplings of domestic object and naked body in *Furniture Bondage* (2009) helped remind me that simplicity and straightforwardness can sometimes hold more authority and potency than complexity. It has been a constant battle to bring this apparent simplicity into my own work. The uncomplicated coexistence of a walking stick and salvaged chair in *Remembrance Chair* (fig.42) was hard-worked upon. In turn, its absence of embellishment strives to evoke much more complex introspection.

I became interested in how the debate concerning the very parameters of what could be termed contemporary fine art practice had been challenged during this study. Institutions such as *British Art Show 8* and *The Turner Prize* had made provocative decisions that had confronted established conventions. These decisions felt particularly germane for me as I felt that my own journey into the art world had, in its own way, transgressed the norm. I had come from a background in illustration, the very name of which was in some circles seen as pejorative: something obvious and crass. I appreciated how the art world had wanted to redefine itself; it was something I was trying to do too.

During this enterprise, I have radically changed my working process. It has become far more immersive, thorough and wide-ranging. At the outset I decided to keep a series of A3 'sketchbooks' that would record the chronological trajectory of my thinking. These sketchbooks gradually became increasingly pivotal as arenas for uninhibited experimentation and also as a private forum for the collation and analysis of prospective 'artworks' to be taken further. The A3 sketchbooks were subsequently augmented by an array of books of different sizes and formats. These helped in extending the range of possibilities still further. Later on, I radically re-evaluated these books, recognising their content as more significant than the merely preparatory. In what became a decisive moment in this research, I beheld and acknowledged their validity as consequential artistic statements in their own right.

I titled my penultimate chapter *Towards an End*, as this piece of writing lead towards my final doctorate submission in the galleries at UEL. This end point is of course not a definitive conclusion. It was rather a moment to collate and present the work I have done so far. I see this juncture much more as an embarkation point; one that will lead my work forwards into new territories. My research in this way has just begun.

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APPENDICES

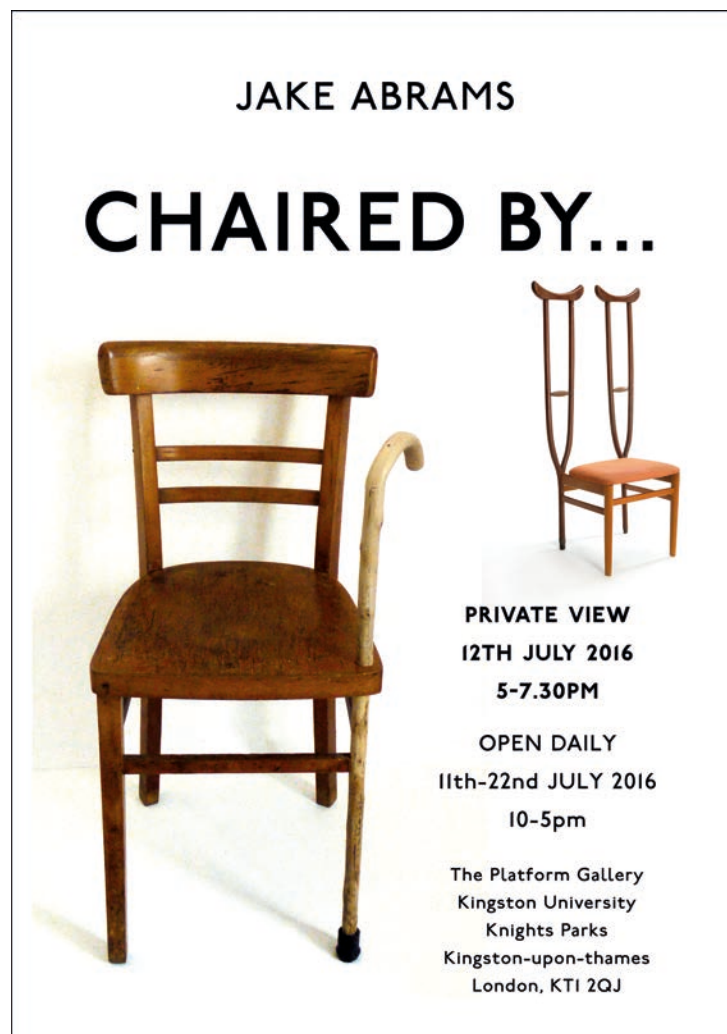


Fig.181. Abrams, J. (2016) *Chaired by..* The Platform Gallery, Kingston University, Exhibition invite.



Fig.182. Abrams, J (2016) *Chaired By..*. Installation view,
Platform Gallery, Kingston University, London



Fig.183. Abrams, J.(2016) *Doctorate Showcase Exhibition.*

UEL Docklands Campus, Exhibition view.

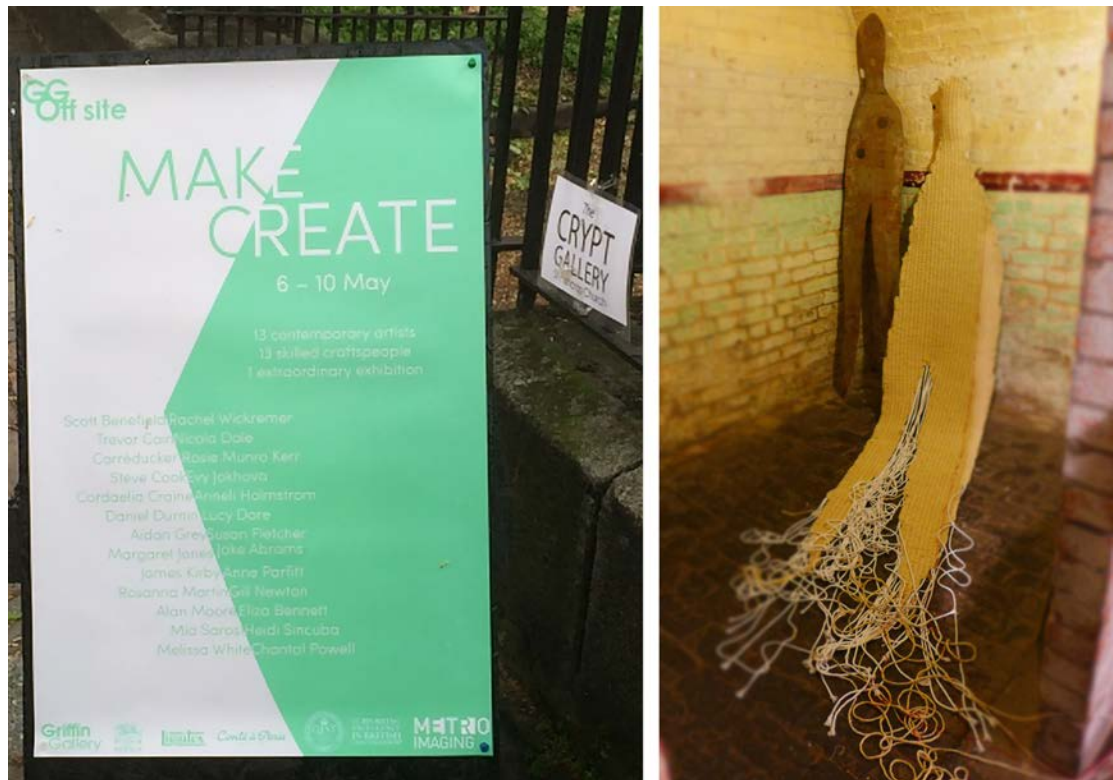


Fig.184. Abrams, J and Jones, M (2015) *Loss*, part of the *Make Create* Exhibition, London Craft Week, The Crypt Gallery, London.



Fig.185. Abrams, J (2015) *ArtMasters*, Exhibition view. October 2015.
The Old Truman Brewery Gallery, London.



Fig.186. Abrams, J. (2015) *Professional Doctorate End of Year Exhibition 2015*,
Paintings on Canvas, UEL Docklands Campus, London.



Fig.187. Abrams, J. (2014) *Professional Doctorate End of Year Exhibition 2014*, s
culptural installations, UEL Docklands Campus, London.



Fig.188. Abrams, J. (2014) *Professional Doctorate Interim Exhibition 2014*, sculptural installation, UEL Docklands Campus, London.



Fig.189. Abrams, J. (2013) *Professional Doctorate End of Year Exhibition 2013*, sculptural installation, UEL Docklands Campus, London.



Fig.190. Abrams, J. (2013) *Professional Doctorate Interim Exhibition 2015*, Chair installation, UEL Docklands Campus, London.



Fig.191. 2012 Exhibition Catalogue from the *Human Face* Exhibition of Illustration Gallery Wooduk, Seoul, South Korea.

